

C. F. Williams Esq.

Subscriber

LIBRARY
OF THE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
AT
PRINCETON, N. J.

DONATION OF
SAMUEL AGNEW,

OF PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Letter.

No.

March 15th 1855.

Case, Division

Shelf, Section

Book, Volume

S.

151

SERMONS AND PRAYERS,

Translated from

THE DANISH.

PRINTED BY J. MOYES, GREVILLE STREET, LONDON.

SELECT
S E R M O N S,
WITH
APPROPRIATE PRAYERS,

TRANSLATED FROM

The Original Danish

OF

DR. NICOLAY EDINGER BALLE,
COURT CHAPLAIN AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY AT COPENHAGEN.



BY THE

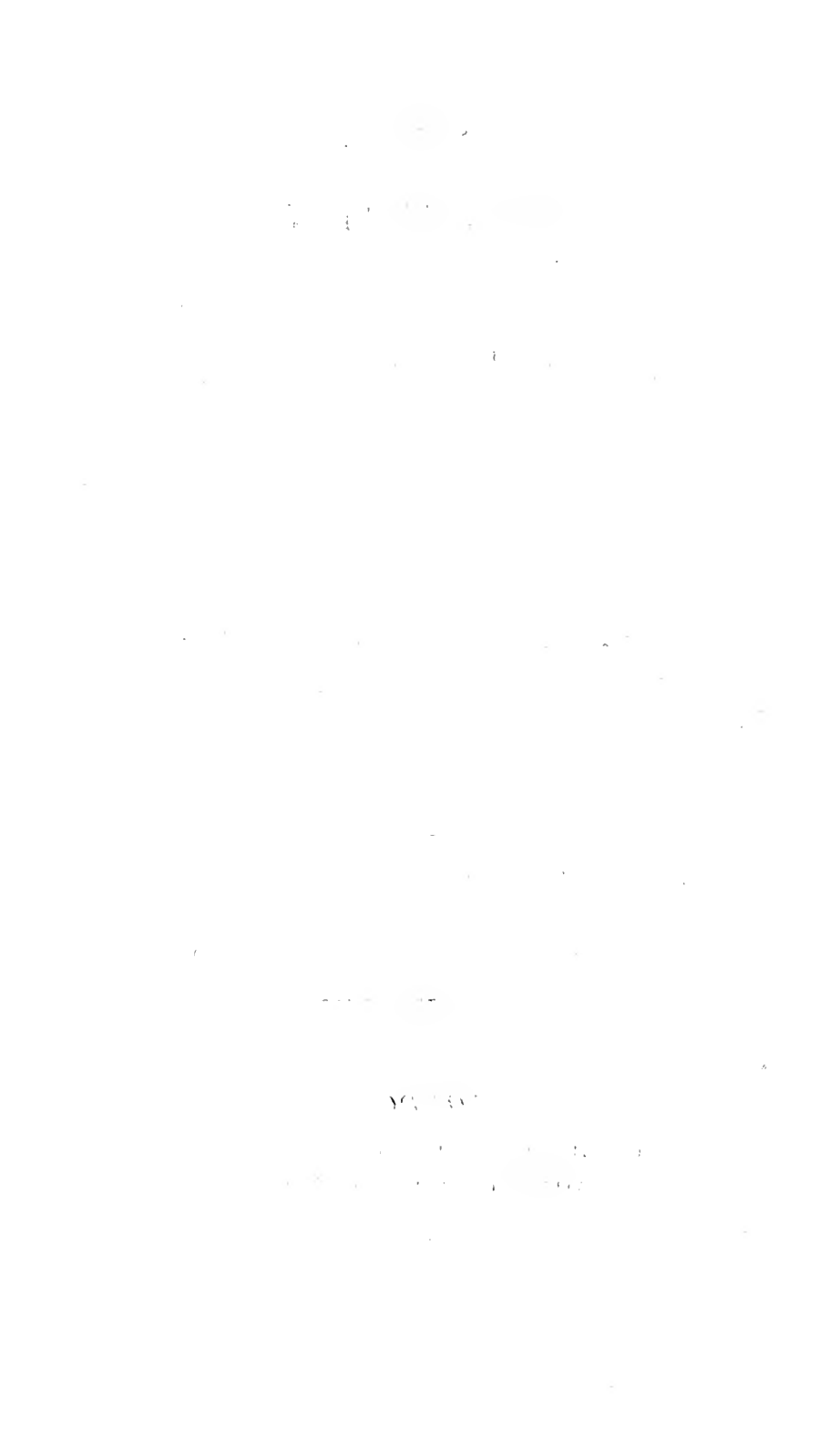
REV. W. PULLING, M. A. F. L. S.
AND LATE OF SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



LONDON:

PRINTED FOR OGLE, DUNCAN, AND CO.
37, PATERNOSTER ROW, AND 295, HOLBORN.

1819.



TO THE
HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
GEORGE PELHAM, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

THESE

Sermons,

PERMITTED TO APPEAR UNDER HIS

DIGNIFIED PATRONAGE,

ARE

Dedicated,

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF PROFOUND RESPECT

AND LASTING GRATITUDE,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST OBEDIENT AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

THE TRANSLATOR.

PREFACE.

THE Sermons and the appropriate Prayers which I have presumed to lay before the Public in an English dress, as a novelty, and with the idea of their being deserving of translation, are selected from several volumes of similar compositions of the same author, which were delivered before the Court of Denmark in the Chapels Royal, between Whitsuntide 1774, when he preached his initiatory discourse, as Court Chaplain, and November 1776, when he gave them to the great body of his countrymen. They were dedicated to her Majesty Juliana Maria, Queen of Denmark, who had been constant in her attendance at their delivery, and was his most zealous Patroness : and among the

subscribers to his work, the author had the flattering honour to enumerate not only her Majesty, but also his Sovereign, Christian VII. and the whole of the Royal Family. His Royal Patrons took an hundred copies ; and all the illustrious personages of the realm emulated each other, in giving their support to a dignitary who was so deservedly distinguished. For the information of those of the public who may honour this translation with their notice, perhaps it may not be superfluous to mention, that various parts of it have been heard by many of its most distinguished patrons; and I am proud to have it in my power to assert, that their kind support of this publication was the effect of their warm approval. In my version, I have endeavoured to be literal, and whenever there has been a deviation from that system, it was done merely to give greater variety to the style. My chief object has been perspicuous simplicity, which is the character of my author : how well I have succeeded in my design, is left to an enlightened and candid public to decide.

In the original, the eleventh Sermon concludes with adverting a second time to the distresses from which the Danish people had been delivered by the hand of the Almighty, described in the ninth, and with a state prayer for the Crown Prince in particular, it being preached on the anniversary of his birth, and for all the Royal Family individually ; but as it is too similar to that in the first, to be interesting to an English reader, it has been omitted. I thought it proper to give one at length, to show the manner of the author.

Of the doctrine contained in the works of this great ornament and pillar of the Danish Church, I believe none of our orthodox clergy will doubt the general excellence. Notwithstanding the energy and enthusiasm apparent in his discourses, (and which were indisputably occasioned by his most earnest desire to guard his compatriots against heterodoxy, and to make them partakers of the fruits of the Christian dispensation, intended for all who truly desire and labour with a

co-operating Spirit to attain them,) I can have no just cause to fear that in his English, although unadorned garb, he can either give offence to those who prefer moral to doctrinal discourses, or be considered as the supporter of others who seem to think that morality is misplaced in religious compositions. The doctrine is Lutheran, according to the established religion: and consequently conformable in every material point of faith, to that of our own most excellent church.

I have only given a verse or two of each Gospel for the day, which forms the subject of Dr. Balle's Discourses, as I thought that would be sufficient to answer every purpose, and as an insertion of the whole would have added much to the size of the volume, without producing any good effect.

To the many noble and distinguished individuals, by whose support I have been honoured, I take this opportunity to express my warmest gratitude: and if the opinion of the public be favourable

to this work, I intend soon to lay before them another volume, of which the component parts have been already heard and approved by several sound divines and elegant scholars.

London,
May 7, 1819.

ERRATA.

Page	10,	line	18,	<i>for</i>	efforts,	<i>read</i>	effects.
—	12,	—	8,	<i>for</i>	2, 3.	<i>read</i>	1, 2.
—	34,	—	5,	<i>insert</i>	the	<i>before</i>	fallen.
—	108,	—	21,	<i>for</i>	vice,	<i>read</i>	vices.
—	145,	—	5,	—	exemption,	<i>read</i>	exception.
—	208,	—	2,	—	was,	<i>read</i>	he.

SUBSCRIBERS.

A.

- ANSON, The Right Hon. Lady, 2 Copies.
Acheson, The Hon. Lady Millicent.
Ashbridge, the Rev. J., M.A., and Fellow of Trinity College,
Cambridge.
Atkinson, W. J. Esq. King's Bench Walk, Temple.

B.

- Burgess, Thomas, D. D. the Right Rev. Lord Bishop of St. David's.
Bath, the Most Noble the Marquess of, 5 Copies.
Bath, the Most Noble the Marchioness of, 5 Copies.
Bradford, the Right Hon. the Countess of, 2 Copies.
Babbage, Benjamin, Esq. Totnes, Devon, 3 Copies.
Babbage, Mrs. J. Totnes, Devon, 2 Copies.
Babbage, Charles, Esq. M.A. and F.R.S. Devonshire Street,
Portland Place, 3 Copies.
Baylay, the Rev. W. F., M.A., F.A.S., Vicar of Margate, 2 Copies.
Blackwell, Mrs.
Blackwell, Miss.
Blackwell, Miss F.
Blackwell, Miss E.
Bloomfield, the Rev. S. T., M.A., Rector of Bisbrook, Rutlandshire.
Boddington, Mrs.
Boddington, Miss.
Boucher, William, Esq. Salisbury.
Boyd, Hugh Stuart, Esq.

- Boyd, Mrs.
 Bridgman, the Hon. and Rev. G. 2 Copies.
 Bridgman, the Hon. Mrs. G. 2 Copies.
 Bridgman, the Hon. and Rev. Henry.
 Briggs, the Rev. J., M. A., Rector of Little Gransden, Cambridge-
 shire.
 Brodie, William, Esq. Salisbury.
 Bromhead, Charles, Esq. M. A., and Fellow of Trinity College,
 Cambridge.
 Bromhead, E. F., Esq. M. A. and F. R. S.
 Browne, Mrs. Hawkins, 2 Copies.

C.

- Cork, the Right Hon. the Earl of.
 Cork, the Right Hon. the Countess of.
 Campbell, the Hon. Lady Elizabeth.
 Calvert, the Rev. T., B. D., Norrisian Professor of Divinity, and
 Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge.
 Campbell, John, Esq. M. P. 2 Copies.
 Campbell, Robert, Esq. 2 Copies.
 Campbell, William, Esq. Weasenham, Norfolk, 2 Copies.
 Campbell, the Rev. C.
 Campbell, Robert, Esq.
 Carr, Mrs. Edmund, 2 Copies.
 Catton, the Rev. T., B. D., Fellow of St. John's College,
 Cambridge.
 Chafy, the Rev. William, D. D. and Master of Sidney Sussex
 College, Cambridge.
 Chapman, the Rev. T., M. A., Birmingham.
 Clarke, the Rev. E. D., LL. D., Professor of Mineralogy, Cambridge.
 Cory, the Rev. Robert Towerson, D. D. and Master of Emmanuel
 College, Cambridge.
 Cory, the Rev. I. J., Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge,
 2 Copies.
 Coxe, the Venerable William, M. A. &c. Archdeacon of Wilts, &c.
 4 Copies.
 Coxe, Mrs. 2 Copies.

Coxe, the Rev. G. Winchester.

Coxe, Mrs. E. H. Winchester.

D.

Douglas, the Rev. William, Chancellor of Sarum, 2 Copies, (*dec.*)

Douglas, Miss, 2 Copies.

E.

Ekins, the Rev. Charles, Canon of Salisbury.

Evans, the Rev. Dr. Salisbury.

F.

Fisher, John, D.D. the Right Rev. Lord Bishop of Salisbury,
Upper Seymour Street, Portman Square.

Fisher, Mrs. Upper Seymour Street, Portman Square.

Franks, the Rev. S. Clarke, M. A. Boxworth, Cambridgeshire.

G.

Greenwood, Thomas, Esq. Gray's Inn.

Gwatkin, Richard, Esq. M.A. and Fellow of St. John's College,
Cambridge.

H.

Halliday, S. Esq. Lower Berkeley Street, Manchester Square,
2 Copies.

Halliday, the Rev. Walter, M. A. Lower Berkeley Street, Manchester
Square, 2 Copies.

Hamilton, Henry Parr, Esq. M. A. and Fellow of Trinity College,
Cambridge.

Harris, the Rev. James, B.D. and Fellow of St. John's College,
Oxford.

Heapy, Mrs. Goodge Street.

Herschel, J. W. F. Esq. M.A., F. R. S. &c. Slough.

Hetley, the Rev. Henry, Rector of Wilton.

Hetley, Henry, Esq. Salisbury.

Hetley, Richard, Esq. Salisbury.

Hinxman, Edward, Esq. Salisbury.

Hole, the Rev. T., M. A., Rector of Doddyscombeleigh, Devon,
2 Copies.

Holme, the Rev. Mr. B. D. and Fellow of Emmanuel College,
Cambridge.

Hume, the Rev. Henry, Canon Residentiary of Sarum.

I.

Isaac, E. Esq. Boughton House, Worcester, 2 Copies.

K.

Kelly, Dr. Finsbury Square.

Kendall, Mrs. Exeter.

L.

Laing, the Rev. F., M. A.

Laing, Mrs.

Le Blanc, Thomas, Esq. LL. D. Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge,
&c. 4 Copies.

Le Blanc, Mrs., Hampton, 2 Copies.

Le Blanc, the Misses, Hampton, 2 Copies.

Lowry, Wilson, Esq. F. R. S. Titchfield Street.

Luxmoore, the Rev. Mr. M. A. Gloucester Place, Portman Square.

M.

Macarthur, J. Esq. LL. D. Hinton, 2 Copies.

Macarthur, J. Esq. B. A., Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, 2 Copies.

Macqueen, Thomas Potter, Esq. M. P. Ridgmont Hall, Bedfordshire,
2 Copies.

Mathew, Henry Albert, Esq. Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, (*dec.*)

Mill, the Rev. Mr., M. A., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Morris, Miss S., Gransden, Hunts.

N.

Newport, the Right Hon. Viscount, 2 Copies.

Newport, the Right Hon. Viscountess, 2 Copies.

O.

Ogle, the Rev. John, Canon Residentiary of Sarum.

P.

- Pelham, George, D.D. the Hon. and Right Rev. Lord Bishop
of Exeter, 2 Copies.
- Pembroke, the Right Hon. the Earl of, Privy Garden.
- Pembroke, the Right Hon. the Countess of, Privy Garden.
- Park, Dr. Southampton Street, Bloomsbury Square, 4 Copies.
- Perring, Mrs. Wimpole Street.
- Pike, Joseph, Esq. Jun. Windsor Terrace, City Road, 2 Copies.
- Portman, Miss, Salisbury.
- Portman, Miss Wyndham, Salisbury.
- Price, the Rev. Dr. Canon Residentiary of Sarum, 2 Copies.
- Prince, Mrs. Magdalen Hospital, 2 Copies.
- Pulling, Lieutenant James, R. N. Chudleigh, Devon.

Q.

- Quintin, T. Esq. Gransden, Hunts.

R.

- Radnor, the Right Hon. the Earl of, 2 Copies.
- Radnor, the Right Hon. the Countess of, 2 Copies.
- Rivers, the Rev. Sir Henry, Bart. Winchester.
- Rivers, the Dowager Lady, Winchester.
- Rumbold, the Hon. Lady, Walton, Herts.
- Rumbold, Miss, Walton, Herts.
- Rumbold, Miss, Walton, Herts.
- Relhan, the Rev. R., M.A., F.R.S., F.L.S., Rector of Henningby,
Lincolnshire.
- Reynell, the Rev. C. Rector of Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire.
- Richards, the Rev. Thomas, 2 Copies.
- Robertson, A. Esq. M.P.
- Roscoe, Robert, Esq. Inner Temple, 2 Copies.
- Rowlatt, the Rev. Mr. Euston Square.
- Roy, the Rev. Mr. Fulham.
- Ryan, E. Esq. M.A. Lincoln's Inn.
- Ryan, Mrs.

S.

- Say, the Rev. F. E., M.A. Vicar of Braughin, Herts, &c.
- Shadwell, Mrs. Queen Square.

Smyth, William, Esq. M. A. Professor of Modern History, and Fellow
of Peter-house, Cambridge.
Still, the Rev. John, Salisbury.

T.

Thynne, the Hon. Lady John, 3 Copies.
Talbot, the Very Rev. Charles, D. D. Dean of Salisbury.
Tinney, J. P. Esq. Salisbury.

W.

Weymouth, the Right Hon. Viscount.
Whitmore, W. W. Esq. Dudmaston, Shropshire, 10 Copies.
Whitmore, the Hon. Lady Lucy, 4 Copies.
Webb, the Rev. William, D. D. and Master of Clare Hall, Cambridge.
Walker, John, Esq. Jun. Argyll Street, Hanover Square, 2 Copies.
Whewell, William, Esq. B. A. Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.
Whitfeld, the Rev. W. Brett, B. D. and Fellow of St. John's College,
Cambridge.
Whittaker, J. W. Esq. M. A. and Fellow of St. John's College,
Cambridge.
Wilde, J. F. T. Esq. New Square, Lincoln's Inn.
Wilkinson, the Rev. Henry, M. A. and Fellow of St. John's College,
Cambridge.
Williams, F. Esq. Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn.
Williams, Mrs.
Woolfe, L. Esq. Balham, 2 Copies.
Wyatt, Mrs. B. Foley Place.
Wyndham, Wadham, Esq. M. P. Salisbury.

LIST

OF THE

SERMONS AND APPROPRIATE PRAYERS

CONTAINED IN

THIS VOLUME.

Sermon	Page
I. — FOR THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY. — The works of the Lord, the most worthy object of the attention of considerate Christians - - -	1
II. — FOR QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY. — The Christian's worthy preparation for a solemn remembrance of the passion and death of Jesus - - -	28
III. — FOR SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY. — Men's dissi- milar participation in the benefits of the Deity does not tend to the abasement of the directing power and mercy of all-wise Providence, but to their far supe- rior exaltation - - - - -	51
IV. — FOR GOOD FRIDAY. — The only Son of God cru- cified on Golgotha for the guilt of sinners - - -	75
V. — FOR SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY. — The salutary effects which are produced in the human heart by the right use of the word - - - - -	96
VI. — FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY. — The divine attributes, a model most deserving of being imitated by the true worshippers of God - -	122

Sermon	Page
VII.—FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.—The glory of God, which was manifested to the world by the nativity of Jesus - - - - -	147
VIII.—FOR THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY. —The certain avenging consequences of a con- tinual abuse of the divine long suffering - -	169
IX.—FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.—The Victory which was obtained by Jesus for the deliverance of Sinners, in his conflict with the Devil - - - - -	200
X.—FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—Stea- diness of faith under the scandalous judgment of the world relative to the crucified Jesus -	228
XI.—FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY. —Why God is induced to delay the assistance of which men occasionally appear to be most in want	252
XII.—FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.— Jesus Christ the peculiar King and Lord of his Redeemed - - - - -	276

FOR THE TWELFTH

SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE WORKS OF THE LORD, THE MOST WORTHY
OBJECT OF THE ATTENTION OF CONSIDER-
ATE CHRISTIANS.

THE PRAYER.

WISDOM and understanding, omnipotence and goodness, Eternal Father ! are predominant in all thy ways and operations. Thy grandeur and majesty are not concealed from the eyes of those of thy rational subjects who consider, with due attention, what thou hast appointed. In all thy works thou demonstratest that the real felicity of thy creatures, in consonance with thy sovereign power, is the object at which thou aimest. Would that our thoughts were constantly directed towards thy wonderful government, and that we were as constantly attentive to thy daily direction as we ought to be ! From step to step, we should discover the most perceptible evidences of the wisest care and providence. By new occasions, every moment we should be animated to pay thee a tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Oh ! that the veil were torn away which covers the eyes of

the inconsiderate, and prevents their contemplation of thy glory ! Touch the cold heart, O Lord, that by the consideration of thy works, it may be excited to love, reverential awe, and adoration. Our lips shall be dedicated to thy renown ; and with exulting voices we will chaunt the praises of the Deity. Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON I.

MARK, vii. 31 — 37.

And again departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coast of Decapolis.

And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech: and they beseech him to put his hand upon him, &c.

AS subjects of an Almighty Lord, whose simple fiat appoints our whole felicity, we are bound to be obedient to his will. As those who are both fashioned by his hands, and have their lives continued through his goodness, it is incumbent on us to offer him the most sincere thanksgivings. As Christians, who are redeemed from death to life by a divine Saviour, we ought to praise, extol, and celebrate his name. Who can deny him these claims without acting in repugnance to reason, and speaking against the clearest testimony of Scripture? "Praise ye the Lord," says David, "for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely."—Psalm cxlvii. 1. It is dear and agreeable to

him to hear his children testify their grateful hearts ; and it is beneficial to them, as an encouragement under the molestations of life, as an effectual remembrance of their duties and obligations, and for the augmentation of virtue and genuine piety. But who can praise the Lord with the understanding, except it be he who is acquainted with his sublime perfections? And where are these revealed more gloriously than in his great and admirable works? In order to attain to the most worthy ideas of the grandeur and the majesty of God, we ought to direct our whole attention to the great thing which here he has performed. “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious.”—Psalm cxi. 2. In the Gospel for the day, we meet with a proof of the efficiency of the Deity, which is deserving of our closest examination. The people are witnesses of one of the stupendous miracles of Jesus, and acknowledge it as an evidence of his divine dignity. He is the subject of their admiration and their praise, being convinced by an act which had brought every considerate observer to reflection. This will give me occasion to propose to you

THE WORKS OF THE LORD, AS THE MOST
WORTHY OBJECT OF THE ATTENTION OF
CONSIDERATE CHRISTIANS.

I will show,

1st. How greatly all the divine operations are deserving of that attention;

And afterwards I will represent to you,

2dly. What is required for such an attention to the works of the Deity, and to what design it ought to be directed.

1st. All the works of the Lord, whether they be of common or of less frequent occurrence, and whether they be those of the kingdom of nature or of grace, are deserving of being noticed with the most careful diligence; for in them all he is great, and worthy of admiration. A goodness unparalleled—a wisdom, of which no one can fathom the profundity—a mightiness which surpasses the highest powers of spirits and of men—which of the decrees of the Deity has not exhibited these attributes in their plenitude of brightness? None but fools can be so blind as not to behold them. Daily do we see the most glorious proofs of the astonishing efficacy of a tender Father; and daily ought our hearts to be elevated in reverential hymns of gratitude for the manifestation of his works of omnipotence. But how lamentable it is, that most painful experience forces from us a confession which is disgraceful both to mind and heart! The multitude see and hear without thought or understanding. What the Lord has performed is

contemplated with an eye of indifference; and his incomparable marks of favour are too commonly received with an unfeeling frigidity of mind. And why is this the case? Because we only know them partially. We do not apprehend the great, the elevated, and the momentous in the operations of the Deity, for that demands experimental reflection. We can be excited by nothing but by external lustre, which affects the senses; and apparent unusual circumstances can alone set the mind in motion. By the general mass of men the operative goodness of God is seldom felt, and seldom are his true wisdom and mightiness conceived; because his works are contemplated without consideration. Would we acknowledge their elevated degree with penetration and conviction, then we ought to consider them in a twofold point of view: 1st. With respect to the manner in which they are performed: 2dly. With a view to their important designs and glorious benefits.

The manner in which the works of the Deity are performed; the plan, order, skill, and power which are discoverable in his dealings, are first deserving of being meditated on with attention. It is true that admirable are all the ways of the Almighty; but man has not sufficient faculties either to survey or fathom all the methods in which the Infinite can execute his wise decrees, and forward the felicity of his creatures. “Who hath stood in

the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word?" is the inquiry of the Prophet Jeremiah, xxiii. 18. What he will order at a future season is hidden from our eyes; and frequently we know not what is his scope in those occurrences by which we are encompassed at the present time. That of which we had the least expectation occasionally happens, while that which was anticipated is destitute of its accomplishment. So little ought we to hope to be able, by our perspicacity alone, to discover the causes or the consequences of the government of God, if he be pleased to keep them in concealment. Still, this ought not to arrest our inclination to examine the works in which he has revealed himself already. Wherefore should he display the most evident proofs of wisdom and understanding? Why should he act in a manner which plainly marks the most incomprehensible omnipotence and bounty, if it were not with a view to his rational creatures, to rouse them to a more accurate inquiry, and to guide them to a clearer knowledge of his sublime perfections? We are taught, both by Scripture and experience, that generally all the divine operations are performed in two ways. One is regular, according to established and usual means. The other is extraordinary, by sole omnipotence, without the exercise of natural means. But in both there is an operation of the one infinite and indivisible power, which com-

prehends the essence of the Deity. The same omnipotence, the same wisdom and goodness are every where effective. The manner alone in which he acts is different, according to the qualities of things, or the especial object which he would attain. He commonly operates, at one time by the aid of nature, of which the innate powers are adopted for their appointed use; at another, by the instruments of grace, the Word and Sacraments, which are ordained to illuminate and improve corrupted man. Thus the dew of heaven irrigates the fruitful earth, that corn may grow up for the sustenance of man and beast. "I will hear," saith the Lord, by the prophet, "I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jesreel."—Hosea, ii. 21, 22. Thus one citizen is sustained by the prosperity of another. The mighty live by the toils of their inferiors; and the latter are protected by the former. Each contributes to his own advantage by giving assistance to others; and all conduce to the general good by common efforts. Thus the Word is taught by some for the instruction and sanctification of others, and their hearts are improved by a right use of the means of grace in the Word, which have been prescribed by God. He has arranged the whole plan, and he actuates the individual parts for its performance. He preserves, supports, and blesses the

whole with a happy progress; and to Him alone the praise and honour appertain, as to one who brought forth all these things, and through whose pleasure they continue to exist in their present condition. Who does not see the grandeur and the majesty of God conspicuously represented in his wonted mode of administration? And what can exculpate the criminal torpor with which these works are commonly considered by the multitude?

Men are more strongly affected by extraordinary events, because they happen more unfrequently. But is the power by which such deeds have been performed more sublime and glorious than the omnipotence which daily preserves the world and all created things? The wisdom of the Lord is not more glorified by miracles than by the common government of nature; and solely to condescend to the infirmity of men, he appears to have occasionally performed what was miraculous. It represents his omnipotence not more magnificently in itself, but more clearly to the eyes of those who are most influenced by what is sensible. With a word, Jesus loosens the tongue of the dumb man; and without human skill he procures him his lost power of hearing. He does this chiefly to excite the ignorant multitude to the consideration and reverential awe of his holy discourses.

The Lord conducted the children of Israel through

the Red Sea dry-foot — fed them with heaven-descended manna in the wilderness — opened to them a beaten track to the land of Canaan through the waters of Jordan — and blessed them above all other nations, with unheard-of victories. This he did to confirm his supreme Divinity by such evidences as were most required, and could be most speedily received by the unpolished people of the times. Still we have not fewer opportunities to bestow attention on the works of the Lord than ancient Israel had, even when continually favoured with new and mighty miracles. The daily benefits which flow incessantly from the munificent hand of a loving Father on us and on our brethren, viz. health of body, strength of limb, necessary sustenance, fertility of soil, tranquillity and peace of the State, the welfare of the land, the progress of religion, and the protection of virtue — all these efforts of a ruling Providence bear witness that God is not simply great in power, but infinite in wisdom, and of the greatest goodness. How easily we could discover occasional extraordinary things even in the common works of Providence, if we were not insensible to them in consequence of habit ! So many contending powers in divers parts of the earth, that might demolish each other, are still all held in harmony most perfect. Even in the hottest battle the human species is preserved ; and civil society stands by mightiness amid all its changes, although all its

members think, desire, act, and strive unlike each other, every one according to his designs or predominant inclinations. What a power, which has alone a capability of giving an impulse to all these forces by a nod, and of bending these minds to its pleasure ! What wisdom, to be able to forward the advantage of the whole by the internal resistance of things ! What greater miracle than that which ever floats before our eyes ? Thus neither can it be denied that all the works of God, with respect to the mode in which he performs them, are deserving of our most careful attention.

But they merit to be observed with similar diligence in consideration of their important designs and glorious utility. They are the effects of boundless compassion, and the noblest fruits of the love of God, and they have an influence both on body and soul, both on man's present and his future bliss. What an affecting spectacle is this beautiful world in all its pride, brought forth and ornamented for our use by an omnipotent Creator ! What enrapturing joy, throughout the various changes of the year, to be always discovering new proofs of the favour and loving kindness of the heavenly Father ! The earth opens her prolific bosom, the sea pours out its riches, and the heavens overflow with blessings for the abundant nourishment of man and beast. The frigidity of winter and heat of summer, the darkness of

night and light of day, proclaim a Governor, who directs all with inscrutable wisdom, and orders and connects the most discordant things, for the preservation of the whole. Yes, David had reason to testify that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work. One day telleth another, and one night certieth another."—Psalm xix. 2, 3. But we who are environed by these speaking evidences, and daily hear them give fresh confirmation of the mercy of the Most High, should we stop our ears, or divert our thoughts from their testimony? Oh! what a reproach! "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know."—Irrational beasts evince a greater gratitude than rational men! How few are they who think of the donor, while they are sated with the gifts! How many participate in the benefits of the Lord, without considering the munificence with which they are poured out! Amid the superfluities of life, the discontented spirit frequently breaks forth with sorrowful complaints, and reprehends the most wise plan of government which has been laid down by Providence. But in the assault of adversity, when the body is attacked by torments and disease; when goods and property are abridged by unexpected losses; when the hope of earthly profit is subverted by unanticipated misfortunes; how seldom is the rebellious mind restrained from bitterest dis-

pleasure? We complain, as they do, who are justified in their conduct; and only feel that which is burdensome in our situation, without seeing the paternal Lord, who chastens in love with the most noble intentions. Even our necessity is an act of God which is worthy of our respect and reflection. Does not the dumb and deaf man in the Gospel, a bearer of his cross in the most pitiable condition, incapacitated from the service of others, and disqualified for the advancement of his own welfare, appear, at first sight, to be an object of the Almighty's anger, and a victim to the most cruel persecutions of cheerless destiny? But, behold what the Lord, in his eternal counsels, had decreed for his deliverance! For the purpose of being produced as an evidence of the divine grandeur of Jesus, he must be subject to suffering a short time, until the wisdom of the Deity finds it serviceable to execute its project. His sorrow is exchanged for redoubled joy, and he becomes an instrument for the extension of the Saviour's honour; a means for the defence of truth against the infidelity of contemners; and a glory, for the wise administration of the Divinity. Let every man try his own affliction, and judge by the result if the Lord has not done all things well. How often the most uncertain prospects are converted into joyous expectations, and threatening dangers changed to peace and to tranquillity! The evil which occurred

to us afforded fresh opportunities for augmented evidences of mercy. He who excited the painful sensations, has assuaged them; and his hands have effected the cure of those wounds which were occasioned by correction. This is the design and glorious usefulness of the works which are wrought by the Omnipotent in the kingdom of Nature, both when he terrifies and gives us joy. Who, indeed, would divert from them his most sedulous attention? But in the kingdom of grace, how numerous and how great are the proofs in which his omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness, are also conspicuous! In order to awaken the senseless people that were slumbering in profound ignorance, under the tyranny of vice and prejudice, Jesus undertakes the most stupendous things; and by his miracles he removes every obstacle to their acknowledgment of his divine mission. Publicly, in the presence of all, he makes whole him who was both dumb and deaf, to stamp the saving doctrines on their minds with energy and conviction; that they might be actuated to hear him with devotion, and coincide with his preaching, and that they might clearly recognise his credibility, which was exhibited in the most infallible and immoveable characters. Still, what is this benefit when compared with those indescribable proofs of mercy, of which the solemn remembrance is constantly renewed among us in our pious congregations, although not

always with suitable progress? That a divine Redeemer has voluntarily freed us from the curses of the law and the dominion of Satan, with his own dear blood; that a compassionate Father, simply through pity, will concede to us the salvation which Christ procured, and consider us, through his merits, as perfectly righteous; and that the Spirit, by the word, will adapt us for, and make us worthy to receive that everlasting joy, with our understandings enlightened and our hearts sanctified, are operations so mighty that they transcend all the excellence which can be imagined, and so important that they contain the only foundation of all our anticipated happiness. To wander here, in the mists of ignorance, alike cold and unmoved, is more than unthankfulness: it discovers, at the same time, a wicked contempt and an insolent resistance of the most friendly invitations of the kindest Father. Daring fools! who defy Heaven, and rush to their own destruction. What the Lord has done is lightly esteemed by the voluptuous, blind, and unthinking slaves of Mammon, "whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame;" but they flatter themselves in their carnal ingenuity. They open their ears to the licentious jests of scoffers, to the wanton bursts of wit of buffoons, and to the crafty or the impetuous counsel of the ungodly; but to listen to the all-bounteous Father, whose voice pervades the universe, is to them intolerable.

That the truth may make no impression, they have armed their vain minds with prejudices and false principles; and that their hearts may be unmoved by the warning admonitions of the word, they have their thoughts constantly dissipated in worldly cares and worldly pleasures. Thus the heedless world causes its own ignorance of the works of the Deity. Men neglect to consider them in a right point of view, and think nothing of the manner in which they are performed—nothing of their important design and glorious uses. That, by a continual neglect, we may not fall into the same most highly destructive ignorance, it is necessary that we should contemplate the divine operations with a competent and well-employed attention. What this requires, and with what design it ought to be carried into effect by considerate Christians, shall be more fully explained in the second part.

Or, in other words, what ought to be the mental disposition of a Christian who will meditate properly on the works of God? He ought to possess, 1st. A virtuous and docile heart, which is sincerely desirous of honouring and loving God with all the affection of which, by his sublime perfections, he is deserving; and, 2dly. An exercised understanding, which is not unaccustomed and a stranger to sacred meditations.

If our reflections were not supported by a virtuous and docile heart, how soon they would lead

us to the most dangerous errors! Mental acuteness, without religion, frequently deviates into pernicious suspicions of the most holy truths. It weakens men's respect for the divine doctrines; invents unjust opinions; approves inaccuracies, through a vain love of novelty; and loses itself imperceptibly in the general incertitude. There are many who investigate the mysteries of nature and of grace; many, who deliberate on what has been decreed by the Lord, as well that which relates to the happiness of all his creatures in general, as also to that of men in particular. But among them the number of those is not small, who miss the right road, and turn aside to inaccurate conceptions. The reproach which was cast on the sages among the Pagans, when they gazed on the works of the Creator, without tracing his mightiness and wisdom in their connexion, is still valid with regard to many of the imaginary wise men of our own times, who set themselves up to judge that which they do not understand; "because that when they *know* God, they *glorify* him not as God, neither *are* thankful, but *become* vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart *is* darkened." Romans, i. 21. Some will derive the whole fabric of the world from blind necessity; others ascribe to chance and unexpected contingencies, its whole regulation. To exclude Providence from the management of things, it is pretended by some, that

the Creator only gave the world its first impulse, and afterwards resigned it to its own course. Under the pretext of not multiplying the incomprehensible operations of God, men have explained the miracles of Jesus as the consequences and effects of the powers laid down in nature. What opinions! As unworthy of reason as they are repugnant to divine revelation. A world which is subject to countless vicissitudes cannot be necessary. It must then have never been, or have continued different from what it is: none of its parts could be dissolved, metamorphosed, or augmented. But a world without a cause or Creator, and a beauteous edifice without a plan or architect, are they not equal absurdities? Could a thing proceed from itself, had there been nothing previously existent? Can a heap of stones fly together to form a palace, or a promiscuous collection of words arrange itself in a well-written dissertation? But now the world would be preserved by its own powers, and yet it possesses nothing, except from God, on whose simple will all its strength is dependent. Can then that which had not been in existence, had it not been his pleasure, continue to exist, were he to withdraw from it his efficient influence, which is the only basis on which it rests? Men are desirous of setting bounds to the incomprehensible dealings of God, and still confess, that his omnipotence in the regulation of nature operates daily

beyond our conceptions. But the vile origin of such false ideas is immediately discoverable. They are the produce of carnal hearts, which panted for outward commendation, and in which most arrogant self-love had fixed its seat. They had no other wish than to extend their own honour, and lent out their wit on usury, in order to be recompensed with the senseless admiration of the simple, being unsolicitous about the value which ought to be attributed to God. Is it wonderful, then, that their heated imaginations gained a victory over reason, and immersed them in the most abominable delusions? If, then, the Lord's works are to be considered with due attention, our heart should be good, and our soul wrested from the dominion of concupiscence. What Jesus performed is seen by the people in the gospel without misbelief, with their eyes solely directed to an accurate examination of all the circumstances, with their mind prepared to receive the right impression, and they hear them not; as the Pharisees, to obscure his honour with malicious criminations. In their conduct, there is no appearance of the least desire to oppose the truth with wrong interpretations; for scarcely does the dumb and deaf man begin to speak, before their hearts are instantaneously filled with holy admiration of his power. To his renown, they confess, with reverential awe, "He hath done

all things well : he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”— Ver. 37. So correct once again, was their judgment of the works of Christ, while wicked inclinations had not inflamed them to persecute him with asperity. They meditated on his miracles, in order that thence they might be convinced of his being sent from God. Thus the considerate Christian remarks what God has done, to discover new evidences of his infinite perfections. His heart is devoid of all evil propensities, which could divert it from the love of truth ;—he is neither in pursuit of the diffusion of his honour, nor of the commendation of men, and he cares not for the boastful name of perspicacity; but only wishes to know God as he is, to worship him with greater confidence and veneration. Therefore, from time to time, he searches the decrees of the Deity with inquiring eyes, and finds what he had sought assiduously, always greater, and always clearer evidences of the boundless wisdom and goodness of an omnipotent and compassionate Deity.

But, to pay a due attention to the divine operations, it is also requisite that there should be a disciplined understanding, which is not unaccustomed, and a stranger to pious meditation. It is in vain to extol the ways of God before him who, through a want of spiritual knowledge, apprehends not with what wisdom and goodness the Deity

operates. In fact, could the carnally-minded man think on the goodness of God, according to its effects on the soul and body, without reluctance ? How little he is affected by the scriptural representations of the majesty of the Most High ! How seldom he is moved by the most sublime descriptions of the love and mercy of the Sovereign Lord ! Such ideas are spiritual, but he is carnal. Every serious reflection speedily begets disgust in minds which are not habituated to any other feelings than those which are excited by the senses. In all cases that which is not sought is but little understood ; and without experience, men seldom judge with accurate sagacity. Of what avail is a hasty glance, a thought which rapidly passes away, or a careless side-view, in order to have an insight into the great and important in the works of God ? And they only who are practised in religious meditations, and who, by a constant perusal of the Scriptures, have acquired a readiness in thinking upon God and godly things, will be able to ruminate on his works with suitable attention. Their thoughts are accustomed to such speculations as require devotion, and a taste for that which is spiritual ; — their ideas are raised above what is earthly, and approximate themselves to heaven ; and their understanding penetrates into the divine operations more deeply than the eye can reach : because it has learned to seek what

is invisible, and stops not, as the children of the world, at that brilliancy which is merely external. Who then is better fitted to search what the Lord has performed, than an industrious lover of the Word, who is devoted unto God; and who is better fitted to prove and judge the wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence which are manifested in all his operations? But what ought to be the design of such an attention of considerate Christians? Is it sufficient to simply know the grandeur and majesty of God, or to have a mere insight into the divine power with which he operates on the world, and ordains the happiness of things created? Yet of what utility is it for knowledge to rest in the understanding without working on the will, and causing an amendment of the heart? What profit arises from a treasure which is hidden in the earth, and where it is consumed by rust and worms? God will be known by his intellectual creatures, that they may honour and magnify him with lively convictions, in worthy canticles of praise; and he places his glory before them in his wise plan, for the government of the world, that they may observe it with admiration, and be grateful to his mercy for its abundant aid. The people in the Gospel were not wrong because they divulged the miracles of Jesus with judicious panegyrics. In this only were they culpable, namely, they were too eager in giving them publicity. For a time only they

were forbidden to talk of them by him ; as he wished to prevent the Jewish council, that were exasperated against him on account of his increasing reputation, from assailing him with violence, and depriving him of liberty or life, before the arrival of that time which his Father had appointed for his death. But for that reason, he had not forbidden his acknowledgers to praise his glorious attributes inwardly, and to be grateful to the Heavenly Father, who had sent a Saviour of such power to give relief to those who were afflicted. On the contrary, when at last he had completed his expiatory sacrifice, it would be their holy duty to confess his divine mission in all places, in the presence of his friends and foes ; to spread abroad his doctrine, promulgate his works, and celebrate his name ; in order to persuade the faithless world to become obedient to the Gospel. “The Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father,” says Jesus, “shall testify of me, and ye also,” namely, his disciples, “shall bear witness ; because ye have been with me from the beginning.”—John, xv. 26, 27. Then, ought not we, who have received his faith, and are led by his precious doctrine to a right knowledge of the most glorious ordinances of the Deity, to witness to the world that God is great, and infinite, wise, and good, mighty and righteous, holy and merciful without bounds ? Then, ought we not to manifest our love of Christ,

and openly exalt his inestimable merits? Yes, this shall be the object of the attention which we pay to the works of God. David contemplated them with heart-felt joy; and full of holy inspiration, sang, “Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O Lord, how great are thy works, and thy thoughts are very deep.”—Psalm xcii. 6, 7. Yes, it is a pleasure, my serious brethren, to be able to discourse of the supreme dignity of our dear Redeemer, and it is a joy which satisfies the soul and refreshes the heart when in the most severe adversity. We ought to be impelled to a most diligent observation of the Lord’s works, not solely by our duty, but also by our own advantage. What greater encouragement is there in the uncertain circumstances of the present life than that which arises from a contemplation of the mighty providence, wise care, and compassionate mercy of our Heavenly Father, exhibited as in a living image, in every part of the kingdom of Nature, whithersoever the eye can be directed? Every day, every step in our lives, will display new proofs of the exuberant favour and loving kindness of the all-bounteous God. His works are more numerous than the sand of the sea; by whom can they be counted? They are altogether unmerited benefits, real blessings, and gifts of mercy; and who can fathom the boundless affection with which

he loves us? The morning of this day testifies again, what we have often experienced, that he is wise, mighty, and good in all his ways. This is an act of God, and a proof of his especial care and defence of us and of our children. That the dear foster-mother of the land has recommenced another year of her existence, endowed with faculties and strength to pray, watch, and care for us, is it not the work of the Lord? whose arm was stretched out to overshadow and preserve her from dangers; whose hand was lifted up for her defence and protection; and whose word and promises have strengthened her soul to courage under the most grievous burdens. Behold! it is the Lord's doing, that she who is beloved by Him was continued a blessing to us, when we were without hope; that love and inward confidence unite the most exalted personages in common zeal for the welfare of their subjects; and that virtue is honoured, piety is promoted, and sobriety retains its worthiness undiminished. Our beloved Queen has been a chosen instrument in the Lord's hand. May He be her great reward and strong fortress in all adversity. What but wishes could we lay at the feet of a virtuous mother, who incessantly does good to us, and loves us as her children? What besides could we bring forward as an evidence of our sincere gratitude? Let us commend our great benefactors, the King and Royal

House, to the safeguard of the Almighty, while with our spirits and our hearts we pray : Father, propitiated, heavenly Father and Lord ! by thy Word and Spirit, preserve thine Anointed, our dearest Governor, king Christian the Seventh, in the road which leads to life ! May his counsels be continually guided by pious wisdom—may his zeal to extend thy honour, and the welfare of his kingdom, be recompensed with a blessed progress ! His life, continued in uninterrupted health, prosperity, and blessing, until extreme old age, will be the most important benefit which thou couldst bestow on us, O Lord, through pity and kindness, for the sake of Jesus. Let thy goodness continually distinguish our dearest queen, Juliana Maria, among those whom thou blestest ; and exhilarate her noble heart, during many years, with this most valued pleasure of the pious : to be enabled to glorify thy great name by virtuous dealings ; to be beneficent towards the necessitous, and to protect the distressed. May she be our pride and joy, our comfort and hope ; a pattern for us in undissembled piety, and a lively proof of thine especial good pleasure, until at length thou shalt call her home, full of years, to the blissful assembly of Spirits, to crown her fidelity with a glory which transcends all earthly expectations. May the eye of thy mercy be open over our dearest Crown Prince, to watch and preserve him from all dangers ! Lead him early to a fruitful observation

of thy glorious Works, that his youthful years may be filled with veneration for thy Divine Majesty, before the world's bewitching adulation has choked the good seed which the Spirit has disseminated in his heart, through the medium of the Word. Augment thy mercy towards our dearest Hereditary Prince, that he may see the most desirable fruits of his indefatigable industry for the welfare of the land ; and may he rejoice in thy trusty defence ! Pour out thy best benefits over the dearest Princesses, and let them never want the most animating occasions to celebrate thy goodness. Be beneficent to all who hope in thy bounty. We will sing thy grandeur and majesty with gladness, and will thank thee from the inmost recesses of our hearts with joyous hymns of praise. Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

FOR
QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE CHRISTIAN'S WORTHY PREPARATION FOR
A REMEMBRANCE OF THE PASSION AND
DEATH OF JESUS.

THE PRAYER.

A THANKFUL remembrance of thy sufferings, hallowed Redeemer, shall be the worship with which we presume to come into thy presence, to supplicate thy continual compassion. Lord, how greatly thou hast loved us, as through voluntary mercy, thou wouldest descend to our nature, and subject thyself to the bitterest contumely, to free us from the merited perdition. Thou oughtest to be thanked with hearts and lips in fervent songs of praise;—thou oughtest to be praised and honoured in prayers replete with devotion;—and with the greatest possible zeal thou oughtest to be obeyed and followed by thy ransomed worshippers. What less proofs couldest thou require of our sincere gratitude for thine infinite benefits? But, how few are willing enough to give thee even the most trifling thanks for all thy hardships! And these few—how

often are they tardy, weak, and addicted to what is sensual? So that thy worship is occasionally neglected even by them also. Thou hadst reason, Almighty Saviour! to avenge thy depreciation with severity; but thou art good, and full of affection, without any limits. We hasten into the arms of thy mercy with a penitent remorse and sorrow, to bewail our sins, and to pray that they may be forgiven. Thou wilt hear us, and by thy supplications wilt procure us the favour of thy Father. For our parts, we will strive, with greater thoughtfulness hereafter, to acknowledge thy precious merits. Strengthen us in this pious resolution by the succour of the Holy Spirit, through the medium of the operation of the Word; and let it be put into execution, in actions to thine honour, but for our advantage, we beseech thee, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hear us, Triune God! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON II.

MATTHEW, iii. 13—17.*

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? &c.

BOTH the Gospel for the day, which has just been read, and the day itself, with which our commonly called Lent-weeks commence, bring us again to one of the most remarkable seasons of our Ecclesiastical year; when the remembrance of the death and passion of Jesus ought to be held sacred. “Behold, my brethren, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”—2 Cor. vi. 21. By the gracious direction of Providence, which has preserved our lives, and defended the Word of Truth from adulteration, again we are invited to consider one of the wisest ordinances of the Deity with renovated attention. The boundless loving-

* “According to the ancient custom in Denmark, this portion of the Holy Scriptures is read for the Gospel on Quinquagesima Sunday.”

kindness and mercy of the Eternal Father, evinced in the sending of his Son to take upon himself the propitiation for sinners ; — the incomprehensible glory and grace to which the holy blood of Christ, which was shed in our stead, has opened unto us an unimpeded avenue, and the incomparable deliverance of which we are thereby partakers : — (for punishment is done away, death is vanquished, and the dominion which Satan had usurped, by means of sin, is subverted) — all these inestimable benefits shall be again recalled in a grateful remembrance, and exhibited to our eyes in their full splendour. How pleasing then must this time be to the considerate friends of Jesus, who acknowledge his infinite merits, and know how to estimate them according to their real value ? Here are consolation and relief, hope and joy, peace of conscience, and spiritual tranquillity, which will not be shaken by the most severe tribulations. Here is a worthy object for the serious meditations of a thinking spirit ; and here the grandeur and majesty of the Deity are revealed as clearly as could be borne by a mortal, and a limited being. But who can duly estimate all the blessedness which has been effected by the Redeemer ? Heaven, which was shut before in consequence of the unexpiated trespasses of sinners, is opened. The righteous anger of the Almighty Judge is exchanged for the love of a compassionate Father. We are liberated from the

tyrannical yoke of concupiscence: we are rescued from the violence of the tempter, and are carried back to the paths of piety, where we shall be sustained and guided by an Almighty Power. What is more just than to be grateful here, where all that is presented to us is pure beneficence and blessing? Such great evidences of favour, in comparison of which, the most excellent benefits in temporal concerns are nothing, ought not to be set aside in silence. Even the mere instinct of gratitude which is implanted in our nature, commands us to diffuse the honour of the compassionating Deity in reverent and solemn hymns of praise. But are we sufficiently worthy to celebrate this divine miracle according to its deserts? Can we consider it with penetration and understanding? Ought we not to be previously prepared for this our important duty by holy meditation? Let us then devote the present hour to a labour which will not be performed in vain. We will consider

THE CHRISTIAN'S WORTHY PREPARATION FOR
A SOLEMN REMEMBRANCE OF THE PASSION
AND DEATH OF JESUS.

For this, it is requisite,

- 1st. That he should sincerely feel his want of a Divine Redeemer.
- 2d. That he should acknowledge the wise coun-

sels of God, in the passion and death of Jesus, with penetration and understanding.

3d. That he should admire the grandeur and majesty with which Jesus was encompassed amid his sufferings.

The Gospel for the day will lead us to a more perfect illustration of those subjects. A Christian's worthy preparation for a solemn remembrance of the death and passion of Jesus requires, then,

1st. That he should sincerely feel his want of a Divine Redeemer.

When Jesus demands baptism of John, the latter declares publicly: "I have need to be baptized of thee."—He does not merely feel his meanness in comparison with the divine grandeur and dignity of our Lord;—he does not simply acknowledge himself to be nothing when assimilated to Jesus, God's own Son, and the Messiah promised by the Father;—it is not the mere veneration which is owed by the inferior to the superior, which induces him to deprecate the mark of honour which was intended for him by the Redeemer:—No! his heart is full of lively feelings of his greatest want of the compassionate mercy of Jesus—"I have need to be baptized of thee." By this visible means of grace which God has appointed, that is, baptism, the real laver of regeneration, thou art able to impart to me the forgiveness of my sins. Thou hast

power to perform that of which I am not capable, to take away sin, and to avert its merited correction; but I, like other men, am in urgent want of this dear benefit. I also ought to partake of the deliverance which thou procurest for fallen human species, for I am sinful, depraved by nature, and, but for thee, condemned to endless sufferings. What a pattern for the self-humiliation of a penitent Christian! So great a personage as John the Baptist, who, according to the testimony of Christ, was “much more than a Prophet, and than whom there was none greater among those who were born of woman;”—he who was delegated by the Lord, according to a former published prophecy, to announce the advent of the Child of Promise, and had received the immediate command of God to baptize in Judea—how deeply *he* humbles himself before his Redeemer! How sincerely he testifies his unworthiness, his infirmity, his need and urgency for the effectual compassion of a Saviour! And we, who are unlike him both in vocation and in properties,—should we then be less ready to humble ourselves, less in need of the atoning death and sufferings of Christ? Still, who among us has any doubts of his manifold sins? And who will deny his natural degeneracy, or ascribe to himself one meritorious virtue, which could procure the love of the Creator, without a previous satisfaction? None of us will presume to

contradict the testimony of St. Paul; “we are all gone out of the way;—we are altogether become unprofitable.” Our own hearts will extort from us the same confession as was made by this heavenly-minded Apostle himself: “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.”—Rom. vii. 18. Only the proud soul who is enamoured of her own imaginary merits, can flatter herself with a perfect purity; for experience teaches us more frequently than we could wish, that imperfection and defect characterize all our endeavours. But is it sufficient to confess our guiltiness with voluntary lips, and not to fancy that we have a holiness untainted? Is it enough to hold this common language, which is not seldom heard even in careless companies?—we are wretched sinners! Ah! what an easy repentance! It solely costs a sound of words, while the mind is unmoved and void of feeling. It demands no subsequent attention;—it causes no affliction;—and disturbs not carnal pleasures. What are the compunction and contrition of the multitude but forced sighs, pretended marks of sorrow, and external humility? But thence proceed that blind levity which steeps conscience in the slumbers of security, until death makes his assault; that indifferent converse with the most astonishing proofs of favour of the Deity; that heedless carriage

towards the incomprehensible solicitude of the Redeemer; and that cold and dead devotion with which his bitterest smarts, and the pangs and agonies which he endured, are customarily remembered. We confess our transgressions without inspecting or observing their abomination, and avow that Jesus is the only Saviour, and that we must have been for ever lost, if he had not given his life as an oblation for our sins; but without any sentiments of sincere and tender gratitude. The most inconsiderable number can perceive how greatly we required the deliverance which he obtained, and how great a favour he did us freely, when he delivered himself up as an atonement for our evil deeds. Shall this inestimable benefit retain its value, and not become indifferent to us? Then, it ought to be known in its right form, and regarded as the only refuge for a sorrowing soul, and the sole remaining hope in the general confusion which has been caused by sin and Satan. We ought to deem ourselves deserving of the avenging wrath of an offended Father, in consequence of our continued aversion to follow his holy precepts; which betrays itself too frequently, even in mere precipitation;—we ought to consider our ingratitude for all this good with which we are blessed as one of the least pardonable failings;—to search the most secret thoughts of our hearts, and to observe, with blushes, how seldom they are perfectly free

from all pollution. This is the method of attaining a lively conviction of the extreme necessity for redemption. Then the anguished heart with longing will desire the protection of the Deity ; for being penetrated with sorrow and affliction for the abomination of sin, it feels its own infirmity ; — and then with a grateful zeal, the contrite soul receives the meritorious righteousness of Jesus, and seeks a shelter in his wounds ; for she knows by her own experience how great is her desert of chastisement. Oh ! how can we avoid being excited to the most ardent love for Him who has rescued us from the jaws of death, as soon as we are inwardly convinced that he alone has averted this certain condemnation ? Then we learn to love him as the most incomparable benefactor, and to honour him as a deliverer, from whom arises all our blessedness. Who can have a better idea of the assistance which was afforded him than he who was in need, and feared destruction ? As that miserable being whose hunger could be satisfied with bread and water, is frequently more thankful to the donor than he who is ever accustomed to swim in pleasure, and to see good days, is, when he has the most important gifts ; — thus the sinner should become the prey of anguish, as one devoid of succour and of counsel. He ought to be driven by hunger and by thirst after a gracious compassion, before he properly can set a value on the inde-

scribable tenderness of the God of mercy. See then, dear Christians, in what manner we ought to prepare ourselves for a solemn remembrance of the death and sufferings of Jesus: not as those vain fools of the world, who begin with sinful recreations this remarkable time, which is appointed for repentance and amendment: not as all the secure and untroubled ones, whose lukewarmness in devotion is dishonourable to Him who was crucified. Scarcely do they deign to cast on him one pitying glance in all his painful sorrows. They are regardless of his contumely, or hear it as a recital of uninteresting occurrences, without bestowing on them a further attention; and prosecute their former sinful courses, as if he had made satisfaction, to procure them an unimpeded freedom in carnal deeds. Through the means of these his false adorers, his holy name must hear itself depreciated among the contemners of the Faith. From their inadvertent conduct, mockers take occasion to brand with infamy the cross of Christ. Redemption assumes the appearance of a doctrine of security, which simply tends to support the wickedness of the impious; and the Son of God is “laughed to scorn” by heathens and by unbelievers; because they who are designated by his name, both in their conduct and their conversation, most frequently evince the extreme of levity.—Nay, my serious brethren, be

it far from us thus to desecrate the precious blood which Jesus shed. His death and passion shall be solemnly remembered with hearty thanksgivings, with fervent prayers and canticles of praise, and with sincere, humble, and affectionate adoration. Inwardly sorrowful for the manifold and heinous misdeeds with which we have occasioned him such bitter pains, we will assemble under his cross, to bring him the oblation of which our hearts are capable, a penitent, filial, and hope-fraught faith and confidence in his victorious satisfaction. Thou seest, Lord Jesu! — thus thinks the considerate Christian, who will prepare himself for a worthy commemoration of the Redeemer's passion; — thou seest my weakness, and knowest my degeneracy. How little have I regarded thy infinite compassion! how impotent am I to eradicate the sinful enticements of corrupted nature! how completely should I be deserving of being cast into the fearful darkness which is prepared for the Devil and his angels, if my deeds were judged according to the rigorous laws of righteousness! Thou knowest this, O Lord, and takest compassion on my calamitous condition. To emancipate me from the thralldom of death, thou wouldest submit to it thyself, and wast the bearer of that load of sorrow which should eternally consume my strength. Oh, thou most precious Prince of Life! the fountain and the base of my

salvation, to whom but unto thee should I repair, that I may save me from the impending danger? By thee I am lifted up from despair to hope, and out of anguish unto joyfulness. By thee I ought to venture, even amid my infirmities, to advance in the slippery paths of life, through temptations and through sorrows, to meet eternity; for thou wilt be my strengthener and guardian; and by thee I shall stand at last in the presence of the Father, absolved through thy righteousness, imputed in faith, from the most afflicting consequences of sin, a never-ending state of reprobation. And thou who, through compassion on my misery, hast stretched out thy arms on the cross, to be transpierced with ignominious pains, with the most tender love, thou wilt extend them again in honour and in glory above, to embrace me as thy dearest child, and to exhilarate me with a beatific enjoyment of all the benefits which thou hast purchased at so high a price.—Humbled with these thoughts, but being again encouraged and adapted to devotion, let us proceed to consider,

2dly. How a Christian will worthily prepare himself for a solemn remembrance of the death and passion of Jesus, by acknowledging in them the wise counsel of God, with penetration and conviction. The Deity had decreed that a Redeemer should be subject unto suffering for

fallen mankind. His death was the Lord's own counsel, and the noblest arrangement of eternal wisdom; and this ought to be acknowledged by a faithful worshipper of Christ, that he may pay due respect to the work of reconciliation. We are again led to this consideration by the Gospel for the day. Jesus requires baptism of John in these words: "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." The word righteousness expresses here in the text what is right before God: and what God has established as a law, and declared to be right, are in agreement with his holy will. It was the determinate counsel of the Lord that Jesus should be publicly baptized in the waters of Jordan; therefore John was obliged to be obedient, and accomplish his request. But why should he be baptized? Did he also stand in need of a means of grace, to obtain the remission of his sins? Should he also be sanctified through the medium of the power of the Spirit, that operates by water, to make a renovated progress in virtue and religion? Yet, what sin could be forgiven in Him who knew none—"who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth?"—1 Peter, ii. 22. What means could be required to forward in the paths of virtue *him* "who was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power?"—Acts of the Apostles, x. 38. It is evident, that for another reason the baptism of

Jesus must have been ordained in the counsels of the Deity, not to be useful to himself, but for the advantage of those for the sake of whom he was come into the world. Immediately after, he begins his public instruction, and works miracles for the confirmation of his doctrine. He diffuses the only saving knowledge in exhortations and cautions, amid countless distresses and persecutions, until he ends his life upon the cross. Thus God then decreed his baptism, that thereby he might consecrate him for his important errand, and exhibit him to the eyes of all, as the delegated Saviour of the world. Scarcely is he baptized ere he begins to act as the Messiah. It might also be the intention of his being baptized, that God would bring him forward on the theatre of the world, as the long anticipated and now arrived deliverer of Israel. Christ himself calls it a righteousness, that is, one of God's established laws, or immoveable decrees. Who then can doubt if his death and suffering were in unison with the wise counsels of the Almighty? That the Jewish spiritual magistrates allow him to be seized;—examine and doom him to death;—that the heathen governor, Pilate, ratifies his sentence, and permits him to be scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified;—and that he is tortured both in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, with most tremendous agony of

soul, are not sufferings which were occasioned by chance, by the ascendancy of men, or by hapless destiny :— the Eternal Father himself had ordered all these circumstances, with wisdom and with infinite understanding, ere the foundations of the world were laid. He foresaw the cruel machinations of these obdurate Jews, and permitted them to be put into execution. He decreed that Jesus should become the prey of their violence ; and Jesus chose to yield himself up voluntarily into their inhuman hands, to be executed as a malefactor, instead of man, according to the arrangement which God had made from eternity for the deliverance of sinners. The Apostles confirm this important truth with indubitable evidence : “ Ye men of Israel, hear these words,” says St. Peter, in his discourse on the day of Pentecost, “ Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know : him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands, have crucified and slain :”—Acts, ii. 22, 23. Jesus is heard to testify before Pilate : “ Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”—John, xix. 11. Again : “ O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his

glory?" — Luke, xxiv. 25, 26. Thus, after his resurrection, he upbraids his disciples on the way to Emmaüs. Yes! it is evident, that the sufferings and death of our Lord ought to be ranked among the ordinances of the Deity himself. Through gratuitous mercy, the Father took compassion on mankind, and appointed their deliverance. The Son offered himself to be their Redeemer, and was made man in order to effect his purpose; and the Holy Ghost took upon him to mould the body of the Saviour in the womb of Mary; to anoint him with extraordinary gifts, for the advancement of his ministry; to operate on the human heart by the Word and Sacraments, for its improvement; and to make us worthy of the heavenly glory which has been obtained for us by Christ. In this manner does the Triune Deity contribute with one and the same efficacy to the deliverance of sinners. This is an operation common to all the Persons of the Godhead: it was arranged from eternity; and, when the fulness of time was come, it was executed by their united power. How important in his sufferings is Jesus now! There, where he is suspended on the cross, he is an offering to eternal righteousness, prepared by eternal wisdom. Who can contemplate him in his pangs and wounds, without seeing the wonderful works of the Almighty? Is it not the Lord himself who gave him up as a ransom for our mis-

deeds? Ought we to presume to reprehend a means of deliverance which has been ordered by the will of the Supreme Governor of the world himself? Still, what is done by those scoffers who, with a furious zeal, attack the Saviour, and trample under foot his sacred blood? It is like storming the heavens, and calling forth to battle the Creator: an audacity which will terminate in misery and lamentation. "They who deny the Lord, who bought them, will bring upon themselves a speedy destruction."—2 Peter, ii. 1. Do they not deserve to be punished with severity, as an example to all spirits and intellectual creatures? They have abused supreme wisdom as folly, and have vilified the inscrutable understanding of the Deity. A more glorious means for the salvation of those who were lost it is not possible to devise; and still they have despised it. Let a man examine all the ways to happiness which reason can discover, and let him ascertain their real nature; on the most trifling reflection, they will be found insufficient: then, on the contrary, that which has been revealed to us by God, can solely take us to the wished-for object. Can the blood of oxen or goats take away sins, or cleanse transgressions? St. Paul declares it is not possible, Heb. x. 4. and simple reason must confirm his judgment. What proportion is there between the anger of an eternal, righteous, and Almighty God,

and the violent death of an irrational beast, which knows not his laws, and which, through a defect of mental faculties, has not been able to offend him ? Could previous wickedness be annihilated, or expiated, merely by man's own contrition ? Then the holy claims of the law would not be satisfied ; the majesty and sovereign mightiness of the Supreme Lord would not be sustained ; perpetrated transgressions would want a compensation ; and God could not exempt from punishment without diminishing his spotless holiness ; — without rendering it suspicious, and drawing on himself the vilifying reproach of secretly approving, or consenting to the wickedness of transgressors. Now, on the contrary, as Jesus has made satisfaction, the righteousness of the Infinite is fully recompensed, and the Law retains its reputation. He made satisfaction both as God and man. As the latter, by spontaneous sufferings, he endures the chastisement of sinners ; and they are imputed to his divine nature, that redemption may be elevated to an unlimited dignity. As a man, he bears the burden ; but as a God, he sustains his human nature, of which the powers alone had been too feeble. All that eternal righteousness could require as an equivalent for the innumerable transgressions of sinners, he was able to supply in both his natures. This is accomplished, and now we are completely free, but he is glorified. Thus the incomprehensible

wisdom of the Deity has ordained this one serviceable and effectual means for our emancipation. We, who should be punished, have our pardon; and God, whose holiness had been offended, obtains its satisfaction. What must we think of the death, and sufferings of the Saviour, when set before us in this important point of view; — and what better preparation for a worthy remembrance of redemption than to meditate on the wise counsel, according to which he was to make an atonement for our sins? Here we are offered the most abundant occasion for admiration and thanksgiving; and here, full of rapturous delight, a never-dying Spirit makes a pause, and beholds her celestial Father encompassed by a glory which transcends the most enchanting pageantry of nature. The kingdom of grace is laid open with greater brilliancy, beaming from the incomprehensible perfections of the Creator than that of nature; and he is greater in the former by means of his bounty, wisdom, and merciful affection. Yes, Father, thou hast displayed thy divine majesty in its most glorious light by the sending of thy Son. He comes to suffer, and Thou appointest him unto death, to impart life to those who were condemned to die. What archangels and all spirits sought vainly to discover, that was found out by thy divine wisdom. Thou wast acquainted with our distress; — thou knewest how to effect its alleviation, and wast willing to promote

our felicity. As long as our lips can express the inmost thoughts of our souls in articulate sounds; and as long as our mouth can interpret the motions of the heart, among us shall thy holy name be blessed; until thou hast admitted us into the assembly of those who are beatified above, where, with angel-voices, we shall sing incessant hymns of praise to Thee and to the Saviour. This our pious resolution, with which we prepare ourselves for the solemn remembrance of the death and sufferings of Christ, will be further confirmed in the third consideration: where we find occasion to admire the elevation and majesty by which he was surrounded amid his sufferings.

3dly. He was baptized, as we read in the Gospel, to be dedicated to a ministry, which brought with it the most severe tribulations; and yet he is glorified by a heavenly voice, which declares, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He is dear to the Father as his only Son, born of his own nature, and a partaker of the same attributes and dignity as himself. So great is the hallowed Redeemer of the human species! more excellent than all the kings of the earth, higher than all principalities, powers, and dominions which have a seat in heaven! "Let all the angels of God worship him," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, i. 6. How much more ought he to be adored by his redeemed; — by those whom he has distinguished

among all creatures by most especial goodness and compassion ! Who can read his life, as it is written by the Evangelists, and entertain a doubt of his being deserving of our most profound veneration, evinced in prayers, exercises of devotion, thanksgivings, and in songs of praise ? His Divinity beams forth every where, even when outwardly he is the most debased. The Pharisees persecute him with defamatory criminations, and the people rage together to overwhelm him with stones. He repays their cruel stratagems with goodness, rendered effective by Omnipotence. He cures the sick, cleanses the leper, raises the dead, drives devils out of those who were possessed, regales the hungry, and consoles the mourner. By his own power, without any instrument or human skill, he performs more in one moment than all the sages of the world could do by industry the most solicitous. He is a Teacher, so indigent and wretched as scarcely to be the owner of that which could procure him a place where he could rest his head : but yet he is so great, that he rules over life and death, and over the sea and spirits. He was more than a man, that is evident. He is worthy to receive our whole reverence and adoration ; who ought to deny him this ? He is treated as a malefactor : still he shows, by different proofs, that he cannot be brought down to a similarity with others. When the guard rush forward to seize him, with

a word he strikes them all to the ground. When he is anguished in the garden of Gethsemane, under the most excruciating sufferings of the soul, “an angel appears strengthening him.” On the cross again he discovers his sovereignty over the visible and invisible. On his own authority he assures the penitent thief: “I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” He is agonized by the last ignominious pangs, and the sun loses his light, and darkness is spread over the whole land—He dies! and the earth quakes, and the veil of the temple is rent in twain. What characters of elevation and of majesty! His life is a compound of tribulations and stupendous deeds; and his death is distinguished by infamy and honour. For our sake, he is the jest of the Jews and scandal of the Romans; and is suspended in derision on the accursed tree, between thieves: but, for his sake, nature is in commotion and perturbation. Yes! we have a Redeemer, who is higher than the heavens, whose mightiness cannot be limited! We have a Deliverer, whose name ought to be commemorated with the most profound adoration!—“Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory, and blessing.” — Rev. v. 12. Amen.

FOR
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

MEN'S DISSIMILAR PARTICIPATION IN THE
BENEFITS OF THE DEITY, DOES NOT TEND
TO THE ABASEMENT OF THE DIRECTING
POWER AND MERCY OF ALL-WISE PROVIDENCE,
BUT TO THEIR FAR SUPERIOR EXALTATION.

THE PRAYER.

THOU art righteous in thy ways, O Lord ! and full of loving kindness in thy works. From thy bounteous hands all thy creatures have received their allotted portion ; and all, according to their several wants, are blessed with what is requisite for the maintenance of life. How little have we reason to reprehend the unequal distribution of thy gifts of mercy among mankind ! Frequently the apparent difference is only imaginary ; but always it is wise, and concordant with the welfare of the whole. Although, as Sovereign Lord, thou hast the power to manage thy possessions according to thy good pleasure only, without more extensive

aims ; yet, however, the utility which accrues to us from our dissimilar conditions, evinces that thy whole plan of government is directed by goodness and by mercy. How sinful has been our conduct, that we, however, have mistaken thy wisdom, and have allowed ourselves to be drawn away by depreciating doubt ; some through the infirmity of the mind ; and some through wickedness and inclination. But, dearest Father ! thy Son, our Saviour, steps forward in our behalf, and pleads our cause ; and, for his sake, we may hope for that forgiveness, which by our actions is not merited. Pray for us, dearest Jesu ! exalted, compassionating Being ! and let thy blood be the shield which hides us from the righteous anger of an offended Father ! Send us at this time the Spirit of thy grace, to illuminate our dark ideas, and, by the conviction of thy word, instruct us how to judge more righteously of the goodness of the Creator towards his children in their dissimilar circumstances. Then hereafter we should bring forward the most hearty thanksgivings for all benefits which have been conferred on us, the least as well as the most important, to Thee, O Triune God ! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON III.

MATT. XX. 1—16.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard, &c.

DIVINE Providence has exhibited the most glorious proofs of wisdom and of goodness in its government of the world.—Men have received numberless benefits from the hand of an affectionate father, and ought to testify their gratitude with praises and thanksgivings, without being impeded by certain occurrences which may appear to them to be less in unison with their ideas of rectitude and justice. Is not the righteousness of the Lord confirmed so frequently by unfallacious evidence, that our doubt should cease, although these events be inexplicable by us? The only wise and all holy Being cannot act except with good intentions; and we are bound to think the best of all his arrangements, even when their utility is concealed; because He hitherto has never given us an opportunity to suppose that it is the worst which could be planned.

However, even in this case, too often are we accustomed to discover our weakness. The most trifling difficulties, which cannot be explained immediately, set the mind in motion, and fill the heart with painful restlessness. The unequal portions of the divine benefits which are conferred upon men, are one of the stumbling blocks, both for virtuous and unrepentant Christians, by which their confidence in the governing wisdom of Providence fluctuates the soonest. The pious Asaph was not far from doubt, when he appeared to notice the most perceptible difference between the destiny of the wicked and the good. He understood not how to make the tribulations of the latter, and the welfare of the former, harmonize with the righteousness of the Deity. “He saw the prosperity of the wicked, and that their strength was firm. He saw that they were not in trouble, and that they were not plagued like other men. He saw their pride, and was a witness of their violence. They were tranquil in the world; and of their riches there was an augmentation; while all the day long he was plagued, and chastened every morning, which made him exclaim, that “his feet were almost gone, and that his steps had well nigh slipped.” Psalm lxxii. 2, &c. So dangerous it is to disquiet ourselves with wavering doubt of the impartial government of Providence!—These repining thoughts do not merely weaken our love for God, and cause a diminu-

tion of that reverence which we ought always to evince for Him, but soon they will become extravagant in ideas which are derogatory to religion, and break forth in open mockery. In our days, also, Asaph has brethren, of whom the number is not inconsiderable. By such temptations the most pious souls may be assailed ; but still all are not capable of withstanding or repelling them with equal strength. Therefore I have resolved this day, with the assistance of God, and by the help of the opportunity which is presented to me by the Gospel, to guide my hearers to a more correct judgment of the dissimilarity which exists in the distribution of the benefits of Heaven. The chief doctrine which is to be expatiated on and demonstrated, is therefore this,

“ THAT MEN’S DISSIMILAR PARTICIPATION IN THE BENEFITS OF THE DEITY DOES NOT TEND TO THE ABASEMENT OF THE DIRECTING POWER AND MERCY OF ALL-WISE PROVIDENCE, BUT TO THEIR FAR SUPERIOR EXALTATION.”

To prepare the way which leads to a fundamental conviction of this momentous truth, we must consider the three particulars which follow : —

1st. That the diversity in the partition of the divine benefits is not imputable as a fault to Providence, because it is frequently more imaginary than real :

2d. That the directing might and power of Providence are peculiarly apparent in the disposal of its gifts of mercy, as itself approves.

3d. That the directing might and loving kindness of Providence are glorified the most by the various conditions of mankind.

1st. That the diversity in the partition of the divine benefits is not imputable as a fault to Providence, because it is frequently more imaginary than real.

The labourers in the vineyard who first were hired, murmured against the good man of the house, “because the same reward had been assigned unto their latest associates,” saying, “these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” They vent reproaches against the generous Lord for paying no attention to deserts;—they grudge their brethren an unanticipated happiness, without regarding their necessity; and in consequence of their ideal superior worthiness, they crave a greater abundance, although they do not need it. The recompence of which, in reality, they were deserving, was given them; but they do not appreciate it as they ought, and complain as if they had sustained an injury.—Here is a lively representation of the general disapproval of the government of Providence. It shows both the basis on which it stands, and the manner

in which it is evinced :—self-interest and insatiable desires obtain the ascendancy within our hearts ! To palliate a mode of thought, which in its true form ought to excite detestation in others, and cause our own confusion before the judgment-seat of conscience, we begin to over-estimate our apparent good actions. Defect and imperfection are set aside ; but the individual virtuous deeds which we have occasionally performed, are brought to light. Our useful dealings we consider as proofs of our noble-mindedness, without reflecting on our obligation to perform them ; and their value is exalted by self-love. Present blessings and donations of mercy are received as a recompense which was well-deserved, and we feel ourselves worthy of greater proofs of the attention of Providence, and expect them, as those who crave essential gifts from princes because they have performed their bounden duty.

The pious fellow-citizen, whose virtue was concealed because he was destitute of opportunities to display it, at last is made effective. He is distressed and indigent, because his former situation had deprived him of the power to obtain what was necessary. But Heaven meliorates his lot, and makes him similar to those to whom he previously had been inferior. Oh, how vexatious is this to those arrogant and selfish souls ! Revenge and envy gain immediate possession of their malicious tongues. With vilifying accusations they thus assail

Providence and its instruments: How unequal is the distribution of things in this world! How little is the attention which is paid to equity! How great is the felicity of one man when compared with that of another!—The exclamations of the discontented when they enumerate their meritorious virtues, are such as these; one boasts of his ancestry, another of his rank, a third of his important situation, and powerful friends, or of whatever is regarded as deserving, according to the fancy of the times. But such an unequal share in the bounty of the Deity is remarked by none but by those who have deceived themselves with unjust expectations. The first labourers in the vineyard had agreed with the householder for the common daily hire, a penny, or a coin which, according to our reckoning, was about the value of one twelfth of a shilling. Their own promises had engaged them to prosecute their labours through the day. What they themselves had desired, and the most that they could deserve, was delivered to them in due time. To hope for more, was simply self-deceit, and to require more, was the greatest injustice. “Friend, I do thee no wrong, didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way.” In such a case, who among us would give a different answer? The last labourers had consumed the greater part of the day in idleness; but of the fault they were not culpable. They were ready in the market-place,

but were hired by none. Compassion stimulates the benevolent owner of the vineyard to give them that which they required for the maintenance of life ; and, through compassion, in his recompense he assimilates them to their predecessors, that he might not give them up to that want of which they were not deserving. Is not this a species of conduct which ought to be eulogized, instead of being censured ? Both parties are the receivers of that which they require ; the one sustains no loss, because the other is indemnified : and with respect to both, the householder is good and righteous. To the former he gives the exact reward which was merited by their toils, and, through his munificence, he supplies that which had been innocently lost by the latter.

How frequently are men the accusers of the unequal distribution of the benefits of Providence, and have, however, no greater reason for their censure, than those envious husbandmen ! We are all the children of God ;—we all are ransomed by the Saviour's blood ;—and, by means of our baptism, we are equally entitled to the good things which can be given us for the sake of Christ. — One need not be destitute, that on another a blessing may be conferred : and the heavenly Governor does not defraud one subject of what is necessary, to pour out a greater abundance on another, for He is powerful enough to cause the felicity of all, without the degradation of each other. Is it an injury to

the healthy and the lively, that they who are diseased receive their cure?—or what is the detriment which is experienced by those who are already favoured with welfare and with honour, if the same progress be made by their poorer brethren? Should we then be constantly raised above others, and constantly distinguished as the favourites of heaven, by extraordinary proofs of mercy? But, however, let us not consider our duties as deserts. Our vocation in the world is a task which is imposed on us by the Sovereign Lord; of equal use to us as unto others. It is not at all serviceable to us, except by the consolation of conscience, the noblest and most precious recompense, that we have done according as we ought. So likewise “Ye,” says Christ, “when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do.”—Luke, xvii. 10. Thus, then, nothing remains which can varnish over our displeasure at the happiness of others. Whether their labours were of long or of short continuance, and whether they were hired early or late, or were of higher or inferior merit because the Lord is bountiful to them, he ceases not to be the same to us; we wanted nothing to constitute a rational and Christian blessedness, while *they*, perhaps, were forced to feel the pressure of adversity and opposition. Our situations are suited to our abilities: and who knows,

if our minds be sufficiently powerful to receive and avail ourselves of several gifts, in conformity with the rules of Christ, while, perhaps, *they* are better fitted for, or could eventually be more instrumental in promoting the honour of the Creator and the advantage of men. The mercy which has been shown to us already, soars above our worthiness, and even in circumstances more calamitous we ought to be thankful to Providence instead of murmuring at its decrees; for a sinful and corrupted nature can possess no prerogative by which we could be entitled to the benefits of the Deity. This would be thinking like Christians, and judging with the understanding respecting the unequal portions in which the Lord appears to bestow his favours on mankind. It is more imaginary than real. Every one receives what he requires, what he is adequate to use, and ought to hope for without presumption. — “Thou openest thy hand, O Lord. and fillest all things living with plenteousness.” — Psalm cxlv. 16.

But should this also be allowed by a virtuous poor man, “who in the sweat of his face” toils for his bread, and scarcely gains the needful sustenance; and while so many of the sincere acknowledgers of Jesus suffer want, and the unrighteous swim in plenteousness? Frequently does the ungodly man adorn his voluptuous body with costly ornaments, and is surrounded by flattering worshippers, while the pious one must clothe himself in

mean attire and shrink back before the unworthy, covered with confusion. Is not the bounty of God too unequally distributed among them? In contradiction to equity, the good man appears to be transformed into the heedless, and without any reason the destiny which was merited by the one has been conferred upon the other. Notwithstanding this, our established observation can be maintained here also. The difference is more chimerical than real. The bounty which surpasses all temporal benefits, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the certain hope of salvation ;—this is the guide of the sincere Christian through all disappointments, to make him a double restitution for every loss in what is temporal. Endued with a cogitative spirit, which can investigate the wonders of nature and of grace, in every situation he finds the most abundant source of noble pleasures, and being redeemed from condemnation by a divine Saviour ;—enlightened by the Word, favoured with peace of conscience, through the medium of faith in Christ, and being destined in him for the incorruptible glories of the eternal kingdom ;—he bears his lot with joyous intrepidity, and to him alone belongs this consolatory encouragement of the apostle, that “ God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” — 1 Thess. v. 9. In his opulence and pleasures, never was the impenitent so happy, as not to put it in the power of the pious

man, with these evidences of the divine favour, to be the possessor of far superior felicity, even amid his most severe afflictions. If the former be delighted with his treasures and his banquets; the latter is exhilarated by his piety and hopes of faith. The joy of the one produces no effect but on the senses; it passes by him with rapidity, and at the hour of death is changed to horror; but the cheerfulness of the other nourishes the soul; it continues in every vicissitude of life; and when the hour of dissolution comes, it increases to an unparalleled salvation. How precipitately then is Providence deemed less solicitous relative to an indigent Christian! for he is blessed in a degree far superior to those, by whom his destiny is pitied. Generally we are too full of error, when we judge of the goodness of the Deity towards men, according to external brilliancy; for it is not that which strikes upon the eye: but the composure of the heart and the joyfulness of the soul, grounded on a conviction of the favour of the Supreme Being, that can occasion our felicity. Disquietude and anguish often draw the deepest lines of care on the countenances of the opulent and the mighty; sleep causes its refreshing rest to descend on the lowly hovels of the poor; but speeds its flight from princely habitations, and the daily hireling is re-invigorated by his homely fare of dry bread and cold water, while restlessness and sorrow excite a loathing of the most dainty viands

in the palaces of kings; for by manifold vexations power and reputation are surrounded.—Yes! the greater is the dignity, the more numerous are the burdens and sufferings; and little is known respecting that which will be advantageous to them, by those who have a longing after what is magnificent and glittering in the world, being dissatisfied with the tranquil station in which they have been placed by Providence. The dissimilarity which exists between the happiness of lords and servants, appears to be disproportionately great; but frequently it is the imaginary and not the real case. Then we are prepared in this first part to form a more correct opinion of men's unequal participation in the benefits of God. It is less considerable than it is supposed to be by the generality of men; no one sustains an injury; each possesses the portion which belongs to him, or compensation is made for the deficiency by spiritual blessings, when the individual is willing to accept them; and, under every circumstance, genuine felicity lies open to all men, in every situation.

But, by this, the whole difference which exists in the gifts distributed by Providence is not sufficiently explained. Some are favoured still less, without any regard to their ability: though they had the power of being more useful, if God had supported their faculties with the necessary means, and had directed them to higher objects. Others have received more,

with which to operate, than either understandings or hearts to bring it into use. To discover the cause of these unequal shares, we must inquire, in the second place,

Whether the power and mightiness of Providence be not peculiarly apparent in its self-approved administration of its benefits? The parable in the Gospel leads us immediately to this elevated conception of the independent and unlimited governance of the Sovereign Lord. The householder asks one of the envious labourers, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" The pence were his property, and he was most perfectly at liberty to distribute them, in more or less considerable sums, to whom he chose, according to his pleasure. Has not God the same authority and power over *his* donations? The omnipotence by which the earth was moulded into shape, communicated to her the capability of bringing forth her fruits; and the hand which spread abroad the firmament of heaven, sends down rain to give moisture to the fields and render them prolific. The earth and atmosphere and seas, with all the opulence which they possess, are the property of the Creator: their use is intrusted unto man, but without any return; for what recompense could be made by us, who are ourselves the operation of his hands, and can do nothing without his succour; and "as in Him" alone we live, move,

and have our being?" But he is the uncircumscribed Lord of all things, and a benefactor through mere compassion. It is spontaneous mercy that our bodies are strengthened by the food which he prepares, and that our hearts are revived by the blessings which he has appointed; and who ought then to prescribe to him the method or the measure of his benefits? Whether his bounty be trifling or considerable, and whatever be the season or the design, it is his own good pleasure: and is it not consistent with our state, to be acquiescent in his will in all things, and to acknowledge his supremacy, without presuming to extend our judgment? We are ourselves too jealous in retaining the independent direction of our own possessions; we cannot bear that an account should be demanded by those whom it concerns not; and, least of all, would we tolerate it in those who are beneath us. But must God be obliged to act every where according to our fancy? Should our Father and Governor acquaint us, in all cases, with the grounds of his operations? So little is the veneration which men discover for their Sovereign Lord, that they judge his works with imperious authority, and in their judgments treat him as an equal. On all occasions men put the remainder of his perfections to the test; they censure the ideas which are formed of his attributes; they have recourse to evasions; they adopt and they reject; but most frequently forget his freedom

and his lordly rule : properties, however, by which he is distinguished from all beings, and by which all are rendered his subjects. Let us rectify this error : for it derogates from the grandeur of the Divinity, and is an obstacle to that pious reverence which is his due. With the most profound humility let us admire, as proofs of his authority and power, those ordinances of which we can neither discover the reason nor design. It is his will that we should acknowledge this, and it is for our own advantage to honour him, not only as the most perfect, but also as the most independent and exalted Sovereign Lord. In the instance of Esau and Jacob, St. Paul has shown us the clearest proofs of the Lord's self-pleasing administration of his benefits—Before they had beheld the light of life, and had done what was either good or evil, their mother was informed by the Lord, that the elder was to serve the younger.—Gen. xxv. 23. But the Apostle justified the ordinance of the Deity, in these words—“ that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.”—Rom. ix. 11. He meant to say, that it was thus, in order that God's freedom in his decrees, with respect to the greater and less felicity of man, might be manifested to the world. We ought to learn from this, that the supreme Sovereign of heaven is not bound to show any evidences of his goodness, either to merit or to

worthiness. He is not influenced by respect of persons, but confers or withdraws either in an inconsiderable or a great degree, according to his pleasure.

It is the inquiry of the Apostle, if there is unrighteousness with God? Be that far from him.—He says himself to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.—So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God, that showeth mercy;” that is to say, it depends not on the desire and endeavours of men, but on the simple merciful bounty and voluntary pity of the Deity. “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardeneth” or treats severely him with whom he pleases to deal in that manner, (15th, 16th, and 18th verses.) Who ought to lift his voice against these divine assurances? What audacity would it be to deny the Creator a right which is a consequence of the essence which he possesses, and of the bond by which we are connected with himself. Of the utility of his decrees we ought to entertain no doubt, for the All-wise does not act without design, and the Holy One allows nothing which militates against rectitude and justice. The motives which actuate him to distribute a greater portion of temporal good things to those who are the least deserving; or to diminish his munificence

towards those by whom a better use of it would be made, are wise and holy, and suited to the welfare of the whole. To Him they are known the best, and are established in unison, both with the wisdom and the goodness of his eternal counsels. But he has chosen to hide them from our view, that our hearts might be habituated to a perfect obedience and subjection to his simple will. If the understanding could always fathom the advantageous and the wise in the paths of the Lord, before we have adapted ourselves to follow them, would not then our own discernment be more entitled to our obedience than his commands? How then could we acknowledge, that he is more than a legislator and an instructor, and that he is a Governor and King? But on our side, most considerable is the advantage. Even the most trifling benefits are received with more fervent joy, when we regard them as gifts of mercy, of which we were undeserving, and as the effects of the benevolent impulses of the heart of a loving Father. They assure us of his affection and solicitude for our deliverance; they strengthen our confidence in his protection, in supervening dangers, and raise up hope in that desponding soul who entertained doubts of her emancipation and of the acceptance of her petitions, through an apprehension of her failings. Yes! it is for our real welfare, that Providence displays its directing might and power

in the administration of benefits as itself approves. So little is our God depreciated by men's unequal shares in the blessings of this life, that the disparity is the cause of the greater increase and exaltation of his unlimited dominion. In fine, it sets forth his infinite goodness in its greatest splendour. Our third remark shall prove

That the directing mercy and loving kindness of Providence are glorified the most by the dissimilar conditions of men. "Is thine eye evil," is the inquiry of the householder, "because I am good?" He reproaches those who had murmured with having allowed envy to banish pity from their breasts, and to render them incapable of discerning or considering the noblest beneficence. But the same reproaches ought to be directed against those inconsiderate beings who mistake the wonderful anxiety of God for the effectual advantage of men, when he imparts his blessings to them with a difference of number or of magnitude. Let us, for one moment, consider a world, the inhabitants of which are similar to each other in welfare and in rank:—where one does not require the support or protection of another:—where opulence and penury, power and weakness, wisdom and simplicity, do not distinguish the multitude into several classes, and where all are completely furnished with the most abundant stores of every thing which can be necessary. Of this world is

the felicity more considerable, and do the lives of these men pass on more pleasantly? at least, intrinsic love has not bound them to each other with that strong bond which joins the indigent to those who are their benefactors--because they are unacquainted with need, they know not how to set a value on abundance. Stimulated by pride and thirst of power, with haste they take up arms, and pursue each other with the bitterest animosity. To be bountiful to the necessitous is a pleasure which they have never felt:--to be perplexed and afterwards relieved by assistance, which could not be anticipated, is a happiness to which they are strangers. Meekness, humility, patience, and fervour in devotion, are virtues of rarer occurrence among them than us: but sensuality, profusion, boldness in word and action, violence and craft, and other vices of a similar nature, are predominant. If such be the case, the condition of the present world has incomparably the pre-eminence. In our various conditions and dissimilar circumstances, the especial mercy and loving kindness of Providence shine forth with a glorious lustre. The all-good Father has strengthened one with power and skill; but has given over another to weakness and infirmity. Both will tend to promote his glory; their services will be reciprocal, and they will benefit each other in their respective situations. The stronger ought to avail himself of his ability to

assist the weaker, to protect him against violence, and to contribute to his advancement. This teaches him to be grateful to the Creator for the means which he has communicated to him, and to think more considerately on their excellent utility. This awakes in his heart a more ardent desire to be careful not only for himself, but also for others, and supplies him with the means to improve his disposition. The weaker also derives a real advantage from his infirmity.—He learns to exercise patience, and that will divert his thoughts from outward vanities, will excite a longing in his heart for a communion with God, through faith in the Redeemer, and make him take pleasure in spiritual meditations. The Lord, who appointed him his weakness, is also the preparer of his release from it, by the instrumentality of those who are his superiors. By this he is encouraged to evince his gratitude towards God and man; and, by this also, a sincere love is excited, both in the assistant and the assisted. They bind each other to a reciprocation of services, in occurring casualties. The distress of the one gives the other an opportunity of manifesting his virtues, and both are subservient to the diffusion of the renown of Providence, in consequence of its gracious arrangements for their dissimilar conditions. Were there none in indigence who could receive the gifts of the opulent, their stores would lose their value

and would become a burden on the conscience; for what are they but dust and rottenness, the prey of worms and of devouring time? Their fruits alone, viz. the succouring of those who are in need; —the deliverance of families from destruction;—the advancement of the general welfare;—and other good actions of a similar nature, for the performance of which the treasures of the earth are ordained by Providence;—these alone retain their value undiminished, and continue to subsequent generations. When St. Paul was desirous of dictating “to the rich in this world” the manner in which they ought to make use of their possessions, in order to be pleasing unto God, and for their own felicity; he charged them to do good, that they might be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.—1 Tim. vi. 18. Thus, the indigent are so far from being appointed for a torment to the wealthy, as to be intended for a blessing. The Lord has distinguished them by a disparity of conditions in that which is external, for the purpose of making them coalesce in common endeavours for the improvement of the heart, to the praise and thanksgiving of the all-bounteous Ruler of the world. He who gives will be exercised in compassion, and, by the misery of his neighbour, he will be reminded of his own want of the continual protection of Providence; and he, by whom the gifts have been received, will

be exercised in gratitude, contentment, moderation, and a disregard of that which is terrestrial. Their debt is mutual: for either procures the other suitable opportunities to perform the virtues of Christianity, and to magnify the honour of the Supreme Being, in their respective lives. Be ye, therefore, tranquil and acquiescent before God, my serious brethren, in your several circumstances; giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. —(Ephes. v. 20.) Amen.

FOR
GOOD FRIDAY.

THE ONLY SON OF GOD CRUCIFIED ON GOL-
GOTHA FOR THE GUILT OF SINNERS.

THE PRAYER.

O CRUCIFIED, but now glorified Redeemer! Thou art our defender and the fountain of our salvation. What thanks should we give thee for the holy blood which thou hast poured out for the forgiveness of our sins; and for thy smarts and anguish, thy wounds and ignominy, and disgraceful death, to which thou hast subjected thyself, entirely through love and pity, to save us from the punishment of which we were so deserving? Yes! we have not thanked thee as we should have done: but have frequently forgotten thine incomparable faithfulness, and have remunerated thee with an inconsiderate disrespect. We have neglected to diffuse thine honour among men; or have evinced a less degree of zeal than was befitting us as thy redeemed; still thou preservest thy love unaltered, and continuest to protect our dearly-purchased souls against the superiority of Satan, being ready to support our faith, and

strengthen it for victory, if we do but heed thine exhortations. Allow, then, thy dear redemption to be continually our most holy meditation; and thy sufferings to be the object to which our hearts are most desirous of directing their devotion. Strengthen us henceforth in a lively confidence in thy merits.—Awaken in our souls an ardent longing after thy society and communion.—Give us power to overcome the bewitching allurements of corrupted nature, and augment our vigour for the exercise of virtue, that our lives may be an ornament to thy holy name, in this world, until, with lips of angel purity, we shall sing thee a more worthy hymn of gratitude hereafter. Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON IV.

JOHN, xix. 1—37.

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him, &c.

WHAT an important day for heaven and earth is this! and of much greater moment unto us, men corrupted by sin, than that on which God formed our first parent out of the dust and made him a reasonable creature. In our present situation we must grieve that we were created, if Christ had not effected our redemption, and with great fear and trembling we must flee, as from Mount Sinai ancient Israel did, if Golgotha did not exhibit the crucified Jesus raised on the cursed tree, for the guilt of our sins, in order to make an eternal atonement for us by his sufferings. “This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.”—Psalm cxviii. 23, 24. In the council of his eternal Godhead, the Father had appointed us this precious oblation as a propitiation for our sins: the Son, the Lamb of God, who bare the sins of the world, had voluntarily taken upon himself

to make compensation for that which we had infringed; now he consummates his gracious determination, and now he makes satisfaction in our stead, that the path to our forfeited happiness may be re-opened to us, and that the Holy Ghost may be able to make us worthy to receive it with purified hearts. Come, then, let us worship before the Throne of grace, and testify, by our devout thanksgivings, that we acknowledge the goodness of the merciful God: come, let us contemplate the Shepherd of our souls in his sufferings, and the blood-stained Prince of our salvation in his conflict with death and hell. The account of his last moments, that has just been read, demands our whole attention, and teaches me, both for edification and devotion, to represent to my hearers, on this day,

CHRIST, THE ONLY SON OF GOD, CRUCIFIED
ON GOLGOTHA FOR THE GUILT OF SINNERS.

1st. As a lively image of the righteous God's avenging detestation of sin and wickedness:

2dly. As an instructive pattern for true servants of God in their most severe tribulations:

3dly. As a consolatory pledge of the grace and compassion of the Most High towards the penitent.

The only Son of God, the Saviour Christ, nailed to the cross on Golgotha, for the guilt of sinners,

represents, in his person, amidst the most excruciating pain,

1st. A living type of a righteous God's avenging detestation of sin and wickedness. How fearful is the account that we have just heard of his last sufferings! Warriors, the Roman soldiers, bring him out from the judgment hall to the common place of execution, out of the city of Jerusalem, that was called the Place of a Skull, because, during many years, there the guilty of death had paid the forfeit of their crimes. Jesus was looked on as a public malefactor; was judged worthy of an ignominious capital punishment, and treated in the same manner as the vilest murderer. What cruelty towards that innocent One, into whose heart neither wickedness nor guile had ever entered! At the place, vinegar mingled with gall is given him to drink: the Jewish council, which had always been accustomed to allow a sort of intoxicating potion to be given to those who were to suffer death, in order that they might be deprived of their senses, and consequently be less susceptible of pain, had sanctioned that drink which was offered him, that an ancient lawful custom might not be set aside. But here also the priests and scribes found an opportunity to manifest their hateful bitterness; instead of wine they brought him the sourest vinegar; this they mingled with myrrh, as bitter

as gall, merely through wickedness, to torment him by every method that their barbarity could devise. He tasted it, but would not drink: he observed the wickedness which they had in their minds, to bewilder his understanding, and to augment his internal sufferings; therefore he determined rather to faint under the burning thirst that the anguish and restlessness of the night had excited. Here again is a fresh proof of derision, the more intolerable as it was combined with the most deadly hatred. Jesus must want even the least drop of water to cool his burning tongue; no one will afford him this most necessary refreshment, but his enemies endeavour to torture him still more, by things that had a power to do him injury. What treatment! now stripped of his apparel he is crucified between two malefactors; is set forth to be a common jest; is hanged on a tree as the leader of a gang of thieves; and, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, “is numbered with transgressors.” Behold, my devout brethren! all the agonizing species of ignominy, that a raging wrath can devise, heaped together on your pious Redeemer, whose whole life had been a series of great and virtuous actions. His body is exhausted by a lingering, but inconceivably excruciating punishment: and his mind is disturbed and tortured by the most indignant contempt. The superscription on the cross denominates him a King, but merely as a mockery

and dishonour: he must suffer the Gentile guard “to part his garments among them, and upon his vesture to cast lots:” his needy friends, who were in want of it, must lose their poor inheritance, and he is not able to defend their right. How this grieved his affectionate and benevolent heart! He must hear the most vilifying reproaches whilst seized by the sharpest pains of death: the travellers who accidentally passed by, and the chief priests with the scribes and the elders, and the rest of the people, yea, even one of the malefactors themselves, who were crucified with him, and the soldiers by whom he was guarded, all upbraid him with his present visible weakness!—all deride his divine dignity, and despise his kingdom, saying, “Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it again in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” And again, “He saved others, himself he cannot save:” “if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him.” Here enmity and a thirst after vengeance gained the victory over all human feelings; and here wickedness and hatred banished the last remains of natural compassion. A well-disposed man never insults the unfortunate in their sufferings, although they have deserved them: but these savage minds assail their most sincere benefactor, who had taught them a pure knowledge of God with wisdom and meekness, had healed

their sick, given rest to the needy, rescued the possessed from the violence of the devil, and fed them in their hunger:—these are they who assail him with unjust criminations, who pervert his doctrine and testimony to a reproach against himself, and redouble his sufferings with contemptuous merriment. Oh! think then on the anguish that Jesus must endure amid those tyrannically-minded men, and judge what his noble soul felt at such outrages! Their obduracy in open unrighteousness; their daring abuse of the most sacred truths to derision and contempt; and their invincible blindness and resistance — what could he do but grieve over such melancholy proofs of the excessive depravity of the human heart? But his torture is not yet ended. The most violent anguish of soul, under the bitterness of which he had nearly sunk in the garden of Gethsemane, assails him again, and forces from him this tremendous cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Thus he had not that consolation remaining, by which other witnesses of the truth were encouraged at their death, that the Father had deigned to bestow upon him his gracious protection and pleasure. Thus the powerful influence of grace was taken away from his sorely afflicted soul, and an agonizing dread laid siege against all his intellectual faculties. He saw the boundless deep which was filled up with the transgressions of sinners, and all these he

must consider as his own, because he had imputed them to himself, as Redeemer. He saw the burning wrath of eternal righteousness kindled against him for vengeance, as a warning and example to the whole rational creation. Is it then wonderful that he broke out into a woeful, but confident complaint? Lastly, when a sponge filled with vinegar, fixed on a bunch of hyssop, had been offered him, he bowed his head and yielded up the ghost. O fearful event!

But how could Providence, which is the guardian of the innocent, here suffer that the most zealous worshipper of God and the most sincere of men should be so piteously tormented, even unto death? And how could it deny him its consoling favour at this lamentable time, without acting in opposition to justice, and ceasing to be righteous? We must stop at these questions, both perplexed and uncertain in what manner they ought to be answered; if the Scriptures had not taught us, that in the person of our blessed Saviour, God would set forth a living type of his avenging detestation of wickedness, and that our sins were laid upon him; for we could not bear them ourselves without being immersed in incessant misery. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows:" and again, "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes

we are healed.”—Isaiah, liii. 4, 5. And “he that knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Cor. v. 21.

Both the sovereign power and the other holy attributes of God, the reputation of the law, and the felicity of the reasonable world, demanded an atonement for the trespasses of men; and either they themselves must be given up to their own destiny, and condemned to ceaseless wailings, through their continuing disobedience,—but this was too inconsistent with the compassion of the merciful Father, who had formed us to receive the abundant proofs of his favour, and desired our eternal welfare — or another, if we could be saved from the impending danger, must make satisfaction for our misdeeds in our stead.—And by what means could God prove that he ruled over all nature with unlimited power, if he could not punish his enemies according to their merits? Who could recognise his detestation of sin and impiety, or worship him as a holy and righteous Judge, if he had not proved in action how much he was offended by that evil? But by what method could he manifest this his holiness and righteousness, except by that of punishing transgressors? What availed it to bind thinking creatures to virtue and good works by laws, if they who refused to obey were not corrected? and how could angels

and all other rational beings discover his determined hatred of vice and trespasses, if punishment were not inflicted on the contemners of the divine commandments? The Lord then must require an atonement for our sins. Without a propitiation he could not forgive, except he chose to militate against his own perfections: then, as man could not make satisfaction without his own destruction, the Son was sent to take our obligations on himself and to fulfil them. The punishment which we ought to suffer must be undergone by him, that the righteousness of the Deity might be glorified; that his holiness might shine forth in its full brightness before spirits; and that his sovereign dominion and power might be fixed on an immoveable foundation. Has not St. Paul expressly asserted, that “God hath set forth Jesus to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins?” — Rom. iii. 25. Now we conceive, why it was allowed by Providence that the guiltless Saviour should become the prey of his most cruel enemies; that angels and the sons of men might learn what chastisement is merited by sin, and how hateful it is to God; and in this the wise Creator would exhibit an affecting proof of his purest love of virtue and of truth; a love, which cannot bear the least wickedness to be unpunished. He will admonish us all of his burning wrath against

wickedness and vice, to deter us from the service of sin, to impress our souls with both fear and sorrow for voluntary disobedience, to draw away our minds from the vanities of the world, and to disturb the carnal security in which the sensual man so quickly sleeps. What then is Jesus in his crucifixion, but a visible evidence of his heavenly Father's impartial righteousness and hatred of sin? But his behaviour on the cross is also,

2dly. An instructive pattern for true worshippers of God in their most severe tribulations.—The words which he spake are golden rules for the conduct of a Christian, for they show such a noble disposition of mind, that it ought to be held up as a model, after which all right-minded men should form their characters and modes of thought. When his enemies mock him, he is heard to pray, “Father! forgive them, they know not what they do.” What patience! David, transported by the zeal of the Spirit, curses the enemies of the Church of God: but Jesus blesses those who had raised their violent hands against her Lord. Elias prays that fire may fall from heaven and consume those who would seize him: but Jesus prays that heaven may open its kingdom of grace, and pour out its loving kindness over those who had torn his agonized body to pieces with murderous stripes;—had doomed him to a painful death without a cause, and now reviled

him in his anguish. What meekness! His heart knows no longing after revenge, and he accomplishes in action the advice that he had formerly given his disciples: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."—Matt. v. 44. But how instructive for us is this pattern of placability! We also, as the faithful followers of Christ, are bound to pardon the defects of our adversaries: and who would leave the world with a soul thirsting after vengeance? Would we accuse our frail brethren hereafter; we, who are accused by an evil conscience ourselves, and require forgiveness? Would we prosecute our warfare there, where peace and unanimity prevail; there continue our disputes, where no sentence will be passed except on those who are worthy of condemnation? Therefore, if ye do not forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will not forgive yours: forgive your debtors, if you would wish that God should forgive your offences.—This is the doctrine of our Lord, strengthened by his own example: this is one of the most sacred Christian duties, which have been enjoined by the Saviour, and for the performance of which he will demand an account at the last day.—Yes, Father!—thus thinks a disciple of Jesus both in life and death;—forgive my enemies, for they know not what they either are doing or

have done. Did they know their duty and my innocence, they would not have depreciated me: teach Thou them to see their own defects, and give them grace for repentance, that the bonds of friendship which have been burst on earth, may, at least, be rejoined hereafter, and continue inseparable in a blissful eternity. The affectionate anxiety of the crucified Jesus for his afflicted mother is also heard.—“Woman,” says he, “behold thy son!” and immediately after he turned to John, and said, “Behold thy mother!” Her tears of sorrow penetrated his feeling soul: he was moved to compassion on the helpless condition in which his death would soon leave her, and was sedulous to procure her the support of a sincere friend. John, his most beloved disciple, is appointed to be her guardian and her comforter; that he might love her as her only son, and might experience a maternal love from her in return. So powerfully is the heart of Jesus affected by the need of his friends, that he forgets his own sufferings to hasten to their assistance. What a demonstration of fidelity and love! It ought to be followed by a worthy acknowledger of the Redeemer, and become a rule for the tenderness which a Christian should feel for his family. How little is it considered by parents, who thoughtlessly waste their possessions in sinful pleasures, until at last they quit this world in penury, and leave behind their children unprovided for, and in cir-

cumstances the most miserable! How shamefully is it transgressed by those thankless children who abandon an urgent parent to a painful want, and deny him the necessary relief! Faithless masters of families forget their honest servants, when they are rendered useless by disease, and unrighteous rulers stop their ears against the piteous clamours of their subjects. But their mind is worldly, and not consistent with the Christian temper: and Paul has painted them in right colours when he testifies, “that if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”—1 Tim. v. 8.

The latest words of Jesus on the cross teach us the best manner of death, and represent a departure from the world that is on many accounts deserving of our wishes. “Father,” says he, “into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Father! O thou, my God, who hast loved me with a paternal affection as thy Son, may my soul be committed to thine Almighty care and protection, now when it departs from the body; take it to thyself in thy kingdom of glory, and exhilarate it with an unchangeable joy in thy society. I have lived to thy honour, and faithfully have I performed thy holy commandments; and according to thy wisdom and thy goodness thou wilt recompense this my soul with abundant blessings. After the example of his Saviour, this is the language that is held by the hope-fraught

Christian at his death. He is not distracted by fearful doubts respecting his future destiny; for faith is preserved in an unspotted conscience from his days of health; and he does not cast back his longing eyes towards the world, with a desire of living there any longer, for he has learned to despise its deceitful brilliancy. No anxious arrangements are heard respecting earthly prosperity, or other similar unseasonable preparations with which the ungodly frequently torment their spirits at the final hour. His heart is already so engrossed by the anticipated happiness of heaven, that it is no longer susceptible of worldly cares. It may excite painful feelings in a virtuous father and mother, that death will separate them from each other, and tear them away from their children; but they are not overcome with grief; for the Lord liveth, who is able to provide for the survivors: time glides rapidly away, and eternity will again effect a union which will never end. What reason is there then for unwillingness or dread? During life, O Christian! mayest thou be thus prepared by faith and piety to meet the approach of death with the fortitude of the Redeemer! Let not the lust of the flesh diminish or expel thy longing after what is heavenly; for only let the vanities of the world intoxicate thy heart, and thou wilt hang upon its outward meretricious glare, and be suddenly betrayed. Let thy heart be converted into a dwelling for the Holy

Ghost, that being sustained by him, thou mayest confidently exclaim, “ Abba, Father !” and eagerly desire that he may accept thy prayer. Then thou wilt die the death of the righteous, and thy last end will be like his. But, my devout brethren, look also on the crucified Jesus, in his sufferings,

3dly. As a consolatory pledge of the mercy and compassion of the Most High towards the penitent. His language comprehends this cheering hope, that a better life awaits us after death ; because all that the Deity required, as an atonement for sin, was by him accomplished. How animating is his address to the penitent thief ! “ Verily, I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” Here is an assurance of pardon, and of a forgiveness of sin ; and here is a promise of a glorious immortality ! Jesus, that man who was despised by the people, and was himself in the most fearful agonies, yet dares to assure a contrite malefactor of the divine mercy. As he who was himself the author of life, and as Lord, possessed the heavenly blessedness, he promises the thief to carry him to his kingdom, and to give him a share of the joys of Paradise. He testifies by his words that the soul is not destroyed with the body, but is continued in a state of being after its egress from the world ; that it will be admitted immediately into a blissful residence ;

and he proves his own glory by declaring, that the thief would be with *him* in Paradise.

What precious doctrines! And these were promulgated by our Saviour in the midst of his humiliation, with an authority which belonged to him, as the Son of God. He proves then, even on the cross, that he is more than man; and he confirms our hope of life and salvation through him; not simply with promises, but in deed and in truth. This once careless, but now amended sinner, mounts from the cross to heaven. Jesus, in his victorious triumph over Sin and Death, conducts him into the presence of his Father; places him before the throne of grace as the spoil of his struggle, and as the fruit of his bloody conflict; and glorifies his redemption by giving him a deliverance from the menaces of hell. Oh! why then should we doubt whether the death of our Lord has also taken away our guilt, and whether his passion has opened to us a sure avenue to the glorious mansions of incorruption? On the penitent thief we see that accomplished which the Redeemer had promised his servants in the preceding part of his ministry; viz. “I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”—St. John, xi. 25, 26.

This then ought to be our most important concern, to be able to imitate this pardoned sinner, by an earnest repentance, and by an immoveable trust and comfort in the propitiation which was made by Christ. How powerful was the faith that he evinced, although surrounded with terrifying doubt and severe temptations! He saw the Saviour in his deepest humiliation; and yet he could honour him as the sovereign ruler of the world. And what are all the impediments which keep back contemners from an acknowledgment of Him now, when compared with those with which the thief must contend, and still he gained the victory? Should *we* then be more tardy in our conviction, more lukewarm in our submission, and wavering in the veneration which we owe him;—we, who have the most immoveable certainty of the grandeur and power of Jesus, in his stupendous resurrection? Our faith will vanquish the most seducing doubt, when it is rooted in a heart which repents of sin and hates iniquity: simply the inordinate lusts of the flesh, and an excessive regard for what is sensual, are the cause of the removal of that trust which ought to signalize the friends of Christ;—those who bear his name, and pretend that they are his adorers. Let a man only strive first to suppress the enticements of evil propensities, and faith will not then be so easily shaken, for it is built on the firmest foundation. Furthermore, has not Jesus

declared, in his solemn assurance on the cross, that all is fulfilled? What the prophets had foretold, and the types had prefigured, that is consummated by his death. The scheme which God had formed from eternity, for the deliverance of a ruined race, is brought forth and fulfilled by his atonement. Our sins are exactly expiated, and an eternal reconciliation is established between the Deity and us. Yes, "Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" Thanks be to God, my beloved brethren, that giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. He cried, "It is finished!" and immediately after yielded up his spirit into the hands of his Father, for now there was no longer any reason why he should live any more in misery: the wretched were ransomed from condemnation, and a well-grounded freedom was procured them. O victorious Redeemer! would that the world could awake from the sleep of security in which it is buried, in profound ignorance, and perceives not what would be for its advantage. The slaves of lust, and captives of the flesh, reject the state of liberty which has been purchased for them with thy blood. They choose rather to serve the old seducer, and to obey his violent dominion, than to possess their dearly-purchased souls, unstained and purified from vanity, beneath thy benign government. Yet rather ought we to pray for their respite, and that grace may be given them for

repentance, than to arraign them for their disobedience. Stir them, then, O Lord! with the penetrating power of thy Spirit, that worketh through the medium of the word, that they may perceive their want of thy precious satisfaction, and in due season seek for the remission of their sins by thy holy blood :—and keep all of us, who love thee and confess thy name, unalterably in a lively faith, until our final breath, that while we are here, we may be able to diffuse thy honour among men by our pious conduct, and that hereafter we may be deemed worthy to sing solemn songs of praise to thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, amid a countless multitude of spirits, in an eternity of happiness. Amen.

FOR
SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE SALUTARY EFFECTS WHICH ARE PRODUCED IN THE HUMAN HEART BY THE RIGHT USE OF THE WORD.

THE PRAYER.

PRAISED be thy all-holy name, our Father and compassionate God ! that thou hast appointed us thy divine word to be a rule for our conduct ; that thou hast set it as a shining light in the paths of our salvation, and hast ordained it to be a remedy for our feeble powers. What thy piteous grace and love decreed for our deliverance ; what thy gracious Son, our dear Saviour, suffered and accomplished for our freedom ; and by what means our sinful nature shall be rendered fit to receive the purchased salvation ;—are subjects which we learn with the most perspicuous certainty from thy sacred doctrines. May we ever be but as ready to avail ourselves of thy gracious benefits, as thou hast been bountiful and munificent to impart them. May we only be sufficiently considerate to prefer the everlasting felicity of

the soul to the deceitful pleasures of the world and to the happiness of life. O! how soon then we should experience the effectual power which thou hast given to thy word, to comfort and refresh, to hallow and improve us. Armed for a triumphant warfare against the allurements of the flesh, we should perambulate thy ways with strength and confidence ; we should love thy truth, estimate it highly, and in all our conduct follow it as an infallible model. Teach us then, O merciful Father ! to be more mindful of thy goodness, and to make use of it more worthily. Give us grace to hear thy precious exhortations with an unfeigned desire of instruction. Give us wisdom and prudence to adopt thy affectionate counsels ! Give strength and ability to execute thy holy will with a happy progress, and permit that in our conduct it may be seen what thy word is able to effect in the amelioration of sinners, in the suppression of voluptuousness, and in the increase of virtue ; we beseech thee, in the name of our Redeemer, Jesus. Our Father who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON V.

LUKE, viii. 4 — 15.

And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable :

A sower went out to sow his seed : and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it, &c.

AS by its origin the word of God is distinguished from human wisdom and earthly ingenuity ; that is, his holy servants spoke because they were under the impulse of the Spirit, that searcheth all things, even the deep things of God ; so, by its especial power, it is highly glorified above all that has been discovered by the human understanding. It does not merely fill the ear with pleasing sounds, but it penetrates into the heart, sets the mind in motion, and excites a longing after a conduct that is well-pleasing to the Deity. And that it persuades us to become virtuous, and exhorts with energy, is not all ; for of itself it effects an improvement of our hearts, it suppresses evil desires, — it ennobles our will, and gives us power to perform that of which

corrupted nature is not capable. Only read with reflection the sublime description which the Lord gave of the miraculously powerful operations of his word in the prophecy of Isaiah. “ For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,” saith he, “ and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater ; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth : it shall not return unto me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—lv. 10, 11. In what a lively manner does this simile represent the prolific influence of divine truth on the soul of man ! By rain the earth is softened, and becomes fit to bring forth fruit ; and by the word the natural hardness of a sinful heart is taken away, and it communicates to the feeble sinner fresh energies and fresh powers for the performance of good works. The rain returns not to the clouds, but spreads its moisture on the thirsty land, and hides its fruitful parts in the bosom of the earth ; and God will not deprive his word of its perpetual efficacy, but continues with a signal progress to make use of it on the soul for a real improvement. Rain refreshes the fainting creature which languished under thirst, and the word animates the anguished mind, that was pressed down by torturing anxiety. Under a similar figure, in the Gospel for the day,

Jesus has attributed the same properties to his word of grace : he describes it as a productive seed, the fruit of which could be increased to an hundred-fold ; and shows that its powerful effects are not arrested, except by the obstacles which have been raised by men themselves. But in this remembrance are also contained both a caution for us against all heedless converse with the sacred truths, and an admonition respecting their right use, in order to attain to the object for which they were promulgated. What better opportunity could I even desire, to hold up and unfold to my hearers the following most important fundamental doctrine ; namely,

THE SAVING EFFECTS WHICH ARE PRODUCED
IN THE HUMAN HEART BY A RIGHT USE
OF THE WORD.

And for that purpose I ought to explain, in the first place,

What saving effects can be produced in the human heart by the word ;

And in the second,

Its right use, in order to produce these glorious effects.

The first head also comprises two remarks ; and we must primarily ascertain whence proceeds

the especial power with which the word of God is endowed ; and, secondly, in what are shown the effects of which it is productive. What Jesus has briefly alleged in explanation of both parts, is more amply illustrated by the Holy Ghost in other places in the Scriptures ; and he confirms it with indubitable evidence. As far as it is possible, we will collect them in a connected order, that their meaning may be placed in a clearer light, and consequently more certain inferences be deduced.

In the present parable, Jesus informs us of the origin of the especial power with which the sacred Scriptures are endowed. The word, designated by the seed, he calls the word of God himself : that is, a doctrine which has been revealed, not by man, but by God ; and truths which have been brought to light, not by any finite and circumscribed understanding, but by the omniscience and wisdom of the Deity. They are distinct from the inventions of the worldly wise, and are hallowed by their immediate divine original ; and they derive their strength and power not from the artifices of wit, or the alluring fascinations of eloquence, but from the co-operation of the Omnipotent. The Holy Ghost combines his effectual grace with the heavenly doctrines, gives weight to the promises, deepens their impression on the heart, and excites in the soul of the readers or hearers, at one time, an inward sorrow for past sins, and at another, a consoling hope and confi-

dence in the merits of Christ Jesus, and an ardent desire to follow the footsteps of the Saviour in the paths of virtue, according to their actual situation and mental disposition. He is ever ready to cause these emotions by means of the word, when it is either heard or read, although in different degrees. His co-operating power is ever living, although not always equally perceptible, and leaves perpetual hints in the mind which is docile. Not the sound of the word, or the form of the letter, but the contents and meaning are rendered effectual on the devout heart, by means of the assistance of the Spirit. The precious and benign assurances by which the supreme compassionating Deity has promised penitent offenders the remission of their sins through Christ, our Lord;—the glorious encouragements by which the faithful are made certain of an access to, and an inheritance in eternal life, through the medium of the atonement and intercession of the Saviour;—and the excellent admonitions that ought to persuade and lead a Christian to an irreproachable holiness, after the example of God and Jesus;—these are the Scriptural truths with which the Holy Ghost especially conjoins his operation. Their power is supernatural, because it surpasses all the great and momentous things that man could effect by his own skill; and it is divine, because it proceeds from God, the Holy Ghost, who in essence and in attri-

butes is one with the Father and the Son. In this respect the name of Word of God is borne by the sacred doctrines : they are called “ the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,” Rom. i. 16 ; and, “ unto us which are saved, it is the power and wisdom of God.”—1 Cor. i. 18, 21. For the same reason St. Paul bore witness that his preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that the faith of his converts should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.—1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. Therefore he says of those who had received the Gospel of salvation, that “ they were sealed with that holy spirit of promise,” Ephes. i. 13 ; and therefore the holy oracles are called “ an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever.”—1 Pet. i. 23. This testimony confirms what Jesus has declared, under the parable in the Gospel, that the Divinity is the cause of the effects of the word, and that its whole salutary influence on men derives its origin from him. Cannot the world bring forward the clearest proofs of the supernatural efficiency of the sacred doctrines, by its own experience ? In vain so many sages among the heathens had been zealous against vice, and had eulogized virtue. With their sparkling eloquence, scarcely could they stimulate a small number of their fellow-citizens to external decorum ; the propensities which tyrannized over

the mind were always too powerful for them. They knew of no method that could be adopted to bring them to subjection. Their hearers found no counsel against the violent assault of concupiscence, and they were the slaves of their bosom sins themselves. Lust, superstition, ignorance of God, and the unrighteousness and subtlety of the mighty, had plunged the most polished nations into the vilest bondage. Piety was depressed, but irreligion triumphed in every place, when the Gospel of Jesus was first to be planted. This word, so displeasing to the flesh; this preaching, so foolish to imaginary wisdom; and these doctrines, so little compatible with the customary wishes of the world, were delivered in simplicity, without skill or grandeur, by indigent and illiterate fishermen. These rejected teachers were persecuted with the most bloody cruelty; and their adherents, before they dared to support the doctrines of Christ, must resolve to expose their lives to the greatest dangers, and sacrifice all their earthly welfare and dignity, rather than war against the truth. Notwithstanding this, the Gospel vanquishes the most formidable enemies: it incites to a serious conversion numberless persons of both sexes, in every place, from every corner of the earth; and effects in one age by poor and despised instruments, that which, during many centuries, mere reason could not, although it was surrounded by honour and by

reputation. The heathens become Christians, more humane, virtuous, and reverential towards the Supreme Being: they learn to know the Eternal as he is, both the rich and poor, the exalted and the lowly: they have a greater certainty of a future state of existence, and no longer seek their happiness in the vanities of the flesh. Does not this visible change supply the clearest evidence of the divine power of the word? It is manifest that the Divinity himself must work with the holy truths; for the world has experienced it in such proofs as no human art and power could produce. Let us receive this consolatory assurance with hearts full of joy and gratitude; we are now convinced that the pious thoughts, the holy purposes, and the devout emotions that arise and burst forth within our souls under a perusal or a hearing of the Scriptures, are grateful to the Lord, for they are his own work. Now we have no longer any reason to doubt the possibility of our conversion; and we have nothing to excite apprehension in consequence of difficulties which meet us in the paths of piety, because the Almighty performs that of which our feeble faculties are not capable: He strengthens the languid powers;—He raises the sinking heart, and by his invincible assistance the word will contend with the depravity of nature and make us profitable in good works. How glorious is the consolation that reanimates our anguished hearts,

when meditating on the sufferings of Jesus! It sweetens the bitter pains which no human counsel could mitigate, for it is the Spirit of God by whom we are comforted. Why does a Christian joyfully await his fast-approaching emancipation from the miseries of the world?—The promises of the word refresh his fainting spirit under the burden of the cross; and this is to him a precious pledge of the loving kindness and grace of the eternal Father, for it is occasioned by the Spirit, that worketh on the heart, according to the will of the Father. This leads me to inquire, in the second point to be considered, viz. in what manner the word of God chiefly evinces its glorious effects. These, in the Gospel for the day, are assimilated by the parable to the produce of a fruitful seed. “That on the good ground,” says Jesus, “are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” A mind which is calm, and takes delight in God, and that murmurs not against Providence because of the tribulations of life, but endures its lot, and bears it with fortitude; a sincere and unpretended resignation to the paternal mercy of the Deity, without either prescribing to him the manner or season, or distrusting his succour in due time, however long it may be withheld—this, according to the testimony of our Lord, is the Christian’s mental disposition, which will be the fruit of the word, for it causes patience

in sufferings, constancy in hope, confidence and comfort in the protection of Providence in all circumstances. But he would simply adduce one proof of its efficacy. His Apostles, however, found an opportunity to illustrate it more extensively, and they have ascribed to the revealed doctrines the most efficacious influence on the principal faculties of the soul,—the understanding and the will. St. Paul testifies, that “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;”—2 Cor. iv. 6; and that the holy Scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation; and that they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim. iii. 15. Jesus himself certifies, that it is his Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing; and that the words that he spake unto them were spirit and life.—John, vi. 63. And he ordained revelation for a common means of grace, both for the instruction of the faithless, and for the confirmation of believers, in the acknowledged truth.

Thus, then, by the word will be effected all the important changes which pertain to the real improvement and conversion of the natural man; it disperses the mists of ignorance, and destroys errors; it exhibits the most glorious attributes of the Deity in their full splendour; it teaches

us to have an adequate knowledge of the decrees of the Most High, that we may judge correctly respecting what is required for our eternal deliverance, and to have an insight into our duties towards Him, ourselves, and our neighbours, with the most perfect conviction. By this means only can the will be incited to an earnest hatred of sin, and to a longing after holiness; and from no source but this can virtue emanate, or righteousness derive its origin. The word ought to be our rule in our actions, because it contains the commandments and the precepts of the Lord himself. But it is more than a rule or law: it is a means of enabling us to accomplish that which he enjoins. Here the understanding discovers what he has done for our redemption; and here the will is encouraged to make it subservient to its interests. We are enlightened respecting the road to life in the Gospel, and are strengthened to follow it by the same holy Book. It binds us to duties, and gives power to perform them; it cautions us against vice, and imparts vigour to resist their seductive fascinations. Here the sufferer will not seek alleviation or relief in vain; for the preaching of the cross pictures to his eye the crucified Saviour as the mighty deliverer of the distressed, who, by his own blood, entered once into the holy place, and brought him back an eternal redemption from his greatest woe,—the everlasting anguish of the soul. Here counsel and comfort will

be found by the disconcerted sinner, who trembled before at the righteous anger of the Sovereign Judge; and here is a cure for the wounded spirit, and encouragement and consolation for a broken heart. Oh! what joy in every trouble to have recourse to this fountain of comfort! O thou afflicted and tormented One! that, destitute of friends, fluctuatest between hope and fear, wanting the most needful restoratives in worldly concerns, and also full of anguish in those which are spiritual; repair to the oracles of mercy, and attend to the precious promises in which the heavenly Father has poured out the fulness of his commiserating heart. Mark those affectionate words, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.”—Ezekiel, xxxiii. 11. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”—Isaiah, xli. 10. Hear also this heart-strengthening encouragement: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John, iv. 16. Hear this inestimable assurance: “The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin;”—this joyful hope: “There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh,

but after the Spirit;”—and also the friendly invitation of the Redeemer himself: “Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Canst thou either hear or read these and numberless other divine promises of a similar nature, without being penetrated with desire and joyfulness;—without being reanimated to hope and fortitude, and excited to the most inward thanksgiving, and without forming the most ardent resolutions to give subsequent honour to the great compassionate Being, by a persevering virtuous course, in due obedience to his holy precepts? When these thoughts and emotions are occasioned by the word, mayst thou give them thy perfect soul! They are the works of the Spirit, which bring forth abundance of fruit for the confirmation of hope, the increase of piety, and the suppression of appetite. Thus, by means of the co-operation of the Holy Ghost, do the saving truths manifest their divine power in those hearts which are contrite and penitent.

The word operates differently on the secure and impenitent, who must be brought to conversion under the discipline of the Spirit: to such belong the menaces of the law and the dreadful fear of wrath, for the hardened heart must be mollified by powerful means; therefore the word which the Lord speaketh is compared to a fire,

and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ;— (Jer. xxiii. 29) and it is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow ; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.— Heb. iv. 12.

When the Almighty declares his eternal displeasure and threatens with vengeance ;—when the derided name and dishonoured blood of Jesus bring complaints against transgressors ;—when all the dreadful anticipations that death and reprobation represent to the ungodly, assail the conscience ; and when the Spirit himself stamps horror on the troubled heart by these torturing images —What an affliction !—who could repel these agonizing emotions and go on in his former inconsideration ? To despise them would be to harden one's self to a sceptical temerity. Would rather that in their invading anguish the unconverted would follow that warning voice which calls them to the Gospel ! Would that they became obedient to the chastisement of the Lord, and suffered themselves to be bowed down to humility ! And would that with a mournful hate of sin, they sped them to the grace of the Redeemer, and sought for an asylum in his merits ! To actuate them to this resolution, for their own deliverance and emancipation, the Spirit has disturbed their security by his threatenings : “ The law is our

schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ," says St. Paul.—Gal. iii. 24. Thus, even what is terrible in the operations of the word, has no other object than the advantage of men. In all cases it is an inestimable means of grace, and a proof of the especial tenderness of the Deity towards the ruined descendants of Adam, which exceeds the highest blessings of the earth. But how little could this really profit us, if we were constantly neglectful of its right use? They who continue from time to time in infidelity and impenitence, know, by their own experience, that the sacred dogmas produce not their effects with irresistible power; for by opposition sinners can efface, or at least weaken the strongest impression. This very circumstance is more accurately explained by our divine Teacher in the present parable, when he enumerates the different methods by which the progress of the seed may be arrested. But under this parable is also contained an instructive remembrance of the holy duties, which are to be more deeply considered in the second head. Christ's description of the impediments to the fruitfulness of the seed teaches us,

2dly. How to acquire a more perfect knowledge of the right use of the word, in order to bring forth its glorious fruits. Attend particularly to the following triple rule:—it ought to be heard and read—1st. with seriousness and attention,—2dly. with penetration and conviction, —and 3dly.

with an indefatigable desire to follow in a sincere simplicity what the Lord has enjoined.

The word cannot produce its glorious effects, except in those who, according to the first rule, are accompanied by devotion and attention when they either read or hear it. As the scattered seed could not penetrate into the beaten path, and was sown to no purpose, being either trodden down by travellers or devoured by the birds of heaven, so neither can the word sink into the hearts of those by whom it is either heard or read, without subsequent meditation: the tempter is at hand and snatches it away; for he is an enemy to their salvation, and tries to obstruct their faith, in order to plunge them into everlasting ruin. “Those by the way side,” says Jesus, “are they that hear; then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” That he, the old serpent, and crafty seducer, who surprised the innocence of our first parents and occasioned their ruin, still persecutes their posterity with the same cruelty, is what we are taught by the Apostle Peter, when he exhorts us to be vigilant, “because our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”—1 Peter, v. 8. But whom can he vanquish with greater ease than the heedless, and whom would he more frequently attack than the simple, who, through a want of

knowledge, caused by their own negligence, are destitute of weapons to withstand him? The word of God ought to fortify them with vigour and courage, but this they know not through their carelessness, and it ought to lead them through all temptation to the wished-for goal, but they are ignorant of its glorious utility, because it has never been the subject of their meditations.— Is it wonderful, then, that many who listen to the divine promises only through custom and without feeling, should cast away their unstable faith at the first attack, and allow the destroyer to gain a victory over the last remains of decorum? We should count a smaller number of the reckless and sinful, were all industrious in the examination of the sacred doctrines; and the contemners of God would be fewer, and the great multitude of secure sinners would be perceptibly diminished, if all were desirous of instruction and ready to meditate on the word. To a cold negligence of the truth ignorance owes its birth; ignorance is the parent of vice, and vice begets mockery. What dangerous consequences! It is rarely the case that wickedness attains at once its summit: it increases gradually, and advances from the least to the greatest offences: but it is not uncommon, that they who were at first negligent or less under the influence of awe, break out at last into an open rejection of the most sacred

injunctions. How assiduously the apostle advises us to “give ear to the word of prophecy, which is as a light that shineth in a dark place!”—2 Peter, i. 19.

David calls him alone “the blessed man, whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates in his law, day and night.”—Psalm i. 2; and St. Paul commended the Bereans, because “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.”—Acts, xvii. 11.

However, at last we ought to be persuaded to become devout and attentive in our pious exercises by so many motives, that is, the dangers to which we are otherwise exposed, the exhortations of God himself, and the example of the saints. Let us then be sedulous to hear and ready to read what God has prescribed, when neither hindered by time nor circumstance; and let us banish extraneous thoughts and lay aside worldly cares whilst meditating on the word, that the mind may not be disturbed and lose its love for what is spiritual! May this be a law which ought never to be transgressed, to begin the day with prayers and close it with thanksgiving; and may it be one of the most considerable of our duties, and one of the first and most important of our labours, to search the Scriptures, in order to collect a greater stock of spiritual ideas for the enlightening and refreshing of the soul; then we are duly prepared to ex-

perience the powerful effects of which the word can be productive. By the second rule we are bound to carry on our pious meditations with penetration and conviction. This also has been urged by Christ, in the adduced parable:—"A part of the seed that fell upon stony places, sprang up, but withered away, because it had no deepness of earth."—This is an emblem of those hearers who receive the word with joy when they hear it; but as they have no root, they only believe for a time, and fall away in the days of tribulation. Their faith was not rooted on a grounded conviction; it rested merely on imagination and human credit, and their knowledge was not the result of deliberation, but had been received without a farther trial. They had confidence in the truth, but without feeling its power, because they knew it not exactly according to its nature; their strength was not real but imaginary; thus when sufferings environed the body, hope must fall, because it was built without a foundation; and when anguish assailed the heart, their faith tottered, for it was destitute of the support which it required. They wanted enlightening, and had believed without the understanding, as blind worshippers of a Redeemer, of whose worthiness and properties they were ignorant. What then could strengthen their courage, or confirm their constancy, when calamity befel them? Alas! that this num-

ber should even now be the greatest ! But how few are furnished with spiritual wisdom to examine truths, and to judge respecting their intrinsic excellence ! How seldom is the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ's kingdom so considerable and extensive, that a man can discover the glorious connexion and order in which one is combined with another, all for the honour of God and our advantage. On this account, so great is the multitude of vacillating and unstable Christians ; and from this arise the many scandalous changes in the Christian world. At one time, when mockery and ungodliness bore sway, men wished to appear to be free-thinkers, perspicacious, more skilful than the great body of mankind, and determined sceptics ; and at another, when virtue was the directress, they were anxious to seem devout, feeling, inwardly affected, and full of faith ; for men for the most part take pleasure in the name of Jesus, and wish to become Christians ; but they forget the trial which ought to be made of the Christian doctrines, and coincide with them without the understanding : neither are they penetrated with the love of the Saviour, for this pre-supposes deep views and deliberation ; but they are merely heated by certain motions of the fancy, which pass hastily away, and are annihilated in a moment when they meet with opposition. Therefore when St. Paul was desirous of preventing the converted Colossians

from relapsing into their former infidelity, through a want of a well grounded conviction, it was his prayer to God “ that they might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that they might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” — Coloss. i. 9, 10. Thus then may it be a steadfastly continuing and unalterable law for all Christians who are rightly disposed and willing to learn, to increase their insight into religion by industry, to weigh the holy doctrines fundamentally, to prove them with care, and to confirm their faith with immoveable evidences. Let them ascertain exactly how much, or how little, the understanding has comprehended of the confession which is made with the lips ; and examine what impression the truth has effected, and what joy, or comfort, or fortitude it has excited in the heart. We confess that our Lord is the Son of God, really God and Man, the Redeemer of the world, and the Prince of salvation ; but let us scrutinize what is our precise idea of these expressions ; whether we understand in what respect the Saviour is called the Son of God, and how both natures, the divine and human, are united in one person ; to what end he made an atonement, by what means, and what was its cause. Then let us try our own strength, whether we know the Scripture

evidences of these mysteries, and how to explain them? If there be not some doubts remaining that require an answer, and how it ought to be given? If such doctrines could contribute to the advancement of holiness, and in what their utility consists? If we be too weak to satisfy ourselves with respect to these or other questions of a similar nature, then also our knowledge is insufficient, and our faith stands on a feeble foundation, and is suddenly subverted in tribulation and adversity. In order that the word then may produce its glorious effects, it ought to be made use of for edification, with clear views and conviction. Lastly, in our meditations on the word, we are bound to bring with us an indefatigable desire to follow, in a sincere simplicity, that which God has appointed. Some of the seed, under the similitude of which the word is described in the Gospel, “fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.” “Such,” says Christ, “are they, which, when they have heard, go forth and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”—An invincible distaste for spiritual meditations prevails in their earthly minds: the sacred doctrines are heard with aversion, when decency commands an attendance in the temple of the Lord, and a wearisome stupefaction envelopes the understanding as long as the enjoined devotion

is continued: they turn their attention to irrelevant and sinful thoughts, that their consciences may not be affected by the admonition of the word, and sacrifice their whole time to external objects which merely concern the body, being careless about the soul, whose advancement in eternal welfare must always be deferred to a more convenient opportunity. Do not these men frustrate the utility which they might derive from the doctrine of Christ, and make the labour of the Spirit profitless by their voluntary disobedience? Their conduct bespeaks a free-willed contempt of grace, and the evil and polluted heart is apparent in all their actions: they are determined transgressors, like the obdurate and stubborn Jews, of whom the martyr Stephen thus complained:—"Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."—Acts, vii. 51. Differently disposed are Christians who have learned to prize the inestimable value of the word. They take delight in thinking upon God, and in living in an intercourse with him by prayer and devotion; they are desirous of hearing that which he commands, and seek their dearest bliss in his communion. In their opinion nothing is to be pursued with greater eagerness than an enlightening relative to his wondrous essence and his deep decrees; than a knowledge of his holy will and their own duties; and encouragement and consolation from his precious promises.

Such a mental disposition characterizes the sincere and good heart in which the word of God will be preserved: but only to those who keep it in such hearts, has Jesus promised its most glorious fruits.—Yes, Lord! thy law is perfect, converting the soul: thy testimony is sure, making wise the simple: thy commandments are right, and give joy to the heart: thy precepts are clear, and enlighten the eyes; and this shall be our comfort in our woes, that thy word will give us endless life. Amen.

FOR THE FOURTH

SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, A MODEL MOST
DESERVING OF BEING IMITATED BY THE
TRUE WORSHIPPERS OF GOD.

THE PRAYER.

So gloriously, O hallowed God! thou hast revealed thine infinite perfections in all nature, and thy divine majesty shines forth so transcendently, through the evidence of thy word; that with admiration thy true worshippers must magnify and praise Thee, as the most perfect Being; and inclination and zeal must impel them, when they meditate on thine attributes, to imitate Thee as a model of virtue most deserving of being followed. Forbid, Lord, that any among us should intentionally shut his eyes, or steel his heart, to a determined resistance. Enlighten the understanding of those who are now surrounded by the darkness of ignorance, that they may see thy glory;—and stamp in their hearts a prevailing longing for thy more immediate society, and a zealous desire to resemble Thee in all the good which

can be suitable unto our nature. Give all of us both inclination and power to follow thine example, and strength and courage to walk in thy footsteps, in the paths of truth and righteousness: then also thy Godhead will be glorified by our lips before the world, until we can sing Thee a more worthy hymn of praise amid the spirits and the saints above. Hear us, Our Father who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON VI.

LUKE, vi. 36—42.

*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is
merciful, &c.*

WHEN Moses meditated on the infinite perfections of the Supreme Being, with justice he could ask, “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord! among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”—Exodus, xv. 11. He thought of the idols of the heathens, and saw their weakness. He thought of the unworthy actions for which their blind worshippers extolled them as holy. He thought of the vices to which they were openly avowed to be addicted, and of the absurd motives, which were related of them by their ministers, in order to deceive the senseless people. But, at the same time, he turned his eye towards the God of Israel, and contemplated His mightiness and glory, evinced in miracles the most stupendous. He observed the dignity which conducted all His operations; the holiness which shone forth in all His ordinances; and the hatred and abhorrence of evil which were manifested in the most righteous laws. He saw the infinite difference between the false gods that were the

works of men's hands, and the true Deity who had been the immediate Creator of both heaven and earth. Is it surprising, then, that he inquires with pious reverence, or rather that full of holy wonder he breaks forth in this affecting canticle of praise, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord! among the gods? glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" But who have greater reason to admire the attributes of God than the acknowledgers of Jesus, to whom the Father, with the Son and Holy Ghost, is revealed in his most glorious splendour? and who ought to take greater pleasure in meditating on the divine perfections, than those who worship Christ, who are not merely led to a right knowledge of God, but are also encouraged and commanded to imitate their heavenly Father, as worthy children? He will not simply be acknowledged and honoured by us, as the most perfect Sovereign Lord, but will be loved and followed by his sincere adorers as their best model. With this intent let us sustain our devotion with a closer consideration of the divine perfections: I will propose

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DEITY, AS A MODEL
MOST DESERVING OF THE IMITATION OF HIS
TRUE WORSHIPPERS.

To illustrate this doctrine, it is necessary to inquire,

1st. What divine attributes the true servant of God ought to imitate?

And then,

2dly. For what purpose, and in what manner, they ought to be imitated?

“Be ye merciful,” says Jesus in the Gospel, “as your Father also is merciful.” He exhorts his hearers to meditate on the mercy of the everlasting Father, with the determination of imitating him in modes of thought and conduct. They must evince compassion on their necessitous neighbour, as the Father has shown pity and mercy to sinners who had been rendered wretched by the fall. They must dilate their hearts to the need of the afflicted, -- alleviate their grief, -- soften their severe destiny, and succour them with benefits, -- with the same promptitude, zeal, and affectionate anxiety as the celestial Parent daily discovers in his gracious provision for them and for their brethren. Here, then, one of the attributes of the Deity is set before our eyes as a pattern deserving of imitation. Here Christ himself has encouraged us to regulate our conduct towards our neighbour, when he is pressed down by adversity, conformably to the tender solicitude which God manifests towards all of us, for our deliverance and for our protection. But is mercy, then, the only one of the divine attributes which ought to be imitated?

Are his other perfections less consistent with our nature? Or does his divine essence possess nothing noble,—nothing deserving of admiration,—which could adorn our immortal soul, except mere compassion? But let us not be hasty in drawing conclusions to the abasement of the holy majesty of God. Because in the Gospel which has just been read Jesus simply enjoins an imitation of the divine mercy, he does not deny that the Deity in other respects must also be our model. Here he merely spoke of general charity unto all mankind: he had recently cautioned them against vengeance and against misanthropy; he had commanded them “to love their enemies, and to lend to them from whom no return could be expected:” now he proceeds to develop the several proofs in which the love of our neighbour should be evinced; and among them, the first which he denominates is mercy. He had not a fit opportunity to extol more of the divine perfections at this place, as deserving of imitation: he requires by name that we ought to follow the Father in mercy on the afflicted, because it was the chief tenor of his present sermon to inculcate on men, a disinterested, impartial, and operative love towards each other: but on other occasions Jesus himself directed his hearers to an imitation of others of the attributes of God. “Be ye perfect; that is, holy, righteous, and without sin, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—Matth. v. 48. Without any limitation, St. Paul

exhorts the Ephesians “to be followers of God as dear children.”—v. i. : and St. Peter admonishes us “to be holy, in all manner of conversation, as he which hath called us is holy.”—1 Epist. i. 15, 16. Thus then we are bound to imitate more of the attributes of the Deity, in order to be formed after his likeness. In many respects he is our pattern; for his essence contains the most glorious perfections in which our image ought to be invested, in order to attain to the worthiness without which he cannot recognise us as his children. But is it possible for us to resemble him in all? Can our limited nature then either receive or contain the grandeur and the majesty of the Infinite? It is evident, my devout brethren, that in many glories he cannot be the object of our imitation. We ought to separate the divine attributes, to which some similarity may have a place in a spirit which is limited, from those which distinguish the Most High, and glorify the great Creator of the world above all his creatures. That the former and not the latter are to be imitated, I hope to be able to explain more fully in the first consideration, where it is asked,

1. What divine attributes the true worshipper of God ought to try to imitate? We know that under the name of the essence of the Deity is contained all the great, the glorious and the perfect that can be imagined respecting a God, considered as Creator of the world, and the Sovereign Lord

over all things ; his essence is indivisible, and nothing can be separated from all the grandeur which is ascribed to him, if he be to continue God. No change, no turning, no beginning or end, no measure, no limit, no confine can be found in his nature : the moment that he is changed from what he is, whether increased, altered, or diminished, we must immediately acknowledge that in himself he is not necessary, and independent of other things. Neither also could he be eternal, but must derive his origin from a higher cause, that could direct, appoint, deteriorate, or improve him. How little then would he be the most perfect Being, the Supreme, the One mighty Lord over all creatures!—if he with justice bears that appellation, in all things he must be infinite: what he possesses must be natural to him, and indivisible from his Godhead, which is all only one perfection, one grandeur, one glory and majesty. He operates at all times and in every place, with one and the same infinite power, but in different ways, according to the different qualities of things that are subject to his operation. Our conceptions of God, when we wish to speak accurately respecting him, must always then be collected under one and the same expression, because he cannot be separated from himself into several parts, except in the consideration of his several perfections: therefore is his essence only one, and God is one. But what

darkness would conceal the celestial Father from his short-sighted children, if all the great and perfect which can be imagined of him were to be surveyed at one glance, or comprehended under one idea, in our feeble understanding ! We should lose our intellectual faculties in the depths of the Deity, and apprehend nothing. We should be stopped by the mere sound of the word ; our thoughts would extend no farther, and disorder, confusion, and obscurity would invade and baffle our judgment. On that account, in our ideas, we must discriminate several perfections in the essence of the Godhead, although in themselves they are all united ; and therefore we must think of God at one time as omnipotent, at another, as wise and righteous ; now, as bounteous, and full of loving-kindness, and then as omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and immutable. It is one and the same God, by whom these attributes are all possessed ; in the aggregate they constitute one and the same essence ; and are an infinite power in the Supreme Spirit, being solely distinct with regard to their operations : but we must consider them separately, because our weak understanding cannot comprehend them, at once, with equal clearness ; therefore several properties are ascribed to Him, and every distinct perfection in his essence, of which we derive a knowledge either from the sacred page of Scripture, or from

the powers of reason, is denominated an attribute. As many individual glories and pre-eminences of which he is the possessor, so many attributes then we believe are found in him, but all combined together in one indivisible power and grandeur.

Of these there are some by which he is distinguished, as Sovereign Lord and as Creator: but there are others which appertain to Him in consequence of his spiritual nature. To the first division, eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience, are especially belonging: on the contrary, the second contains his holiness, goodness, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness. Can it now be difficult for us to judge which of the attributes of the Deity ought to be the objects of our imitation? As little as we can ascribe to ourselves a superiority over the universe, a power to create, or a free and unlimited faculty to operate according to our own pleasure; so little ought we to imagine that we could resemble our God, in the former division of his properties, by which he is distinguished as Creator and as Sovereign Lord. Then our life has a beginning and hastens on to its impending end; and then our spirit is not self-existent, but draws her origin from God; who, according to his own good pleasure, has formed her for an everlasting state: besides what similarity is there between the eternity of which

He is the possessor, and that of which we could have any expectation? He for ever knows no origin and no decay, and of his years there cannot be either an increase or a diminution: he has always dwelt in his divine glory, and he eternally will be existent, encompassed with the highest happiness. David says of him, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, thou art God from everlasting, and world without end."—Psalm xc. 2. "The heavens and the earth shall perish," says St. Paul, "but thou, O Lord! remainest: they shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture thou shalt fold them up and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."—Heb. i. 10, 11, 12. And St. James says, that "with the Father of lights there is no variableness or shadow of turning."—i. 17. His mightiness forsakes him not, and his power passes not away. What he decreed from eternity, will be immoveable for ever: it repents him not to have determined on a counsel: and this must be accomplished without being arrested by impediments. But what is more variable than man, both in mental qualities and in corporeal condition? What formerly we would not, that we have now resolved to do; and that which formerly we disbelieved, may, after a little time, be adopted with our concurrence. Yes! it would be

evident folly to have a wish to resemble the Deity in his eternal and unchanging nature. Such perfections are suitable to none, except to Him who is the Author of the good and perfect.

But could it be more easy for us to imitate his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence? God is almighty, because He presides over all nature, and effects all by his simple will. That which he will execute occasions him no trouble: with a word he creates the world, and with a nod he turns it to destruction. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth: he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."—Psalm xxxiii. 6, 9. God is omniscient, because the most secret thoughts in the hearts of men are known to him; and because the most remote past occurrences and future casualties, even to the desolation of the world; both the actual and the possible, and the vast and the diminutive, from everlasting, are contemplated by him with the most certain insight and prescience, as in the clearest light. "Lord," says the Psalmist, "thou hast searched me out, and known me: thou knowest my down-sitting and up-rising: thou understandest my thoughts long before; thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. For, lo! there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O Lord! knowest it altogether."—Psalm cxxxix. 1, 2, 3. He rules in heaven and earth, is equally near all his

creatures, is effective on them all, and is present with every one, with will and understanding, with knowledge and with power, with essence and with nature. “ Whither shall I go then from thy spirit ? ” continues David ; “ or whither shall I go from thy presence ? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there ; if I go down to hell, thou art there also : if I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”—Psalm cxxxix. 6, 7, 8, 9. But do we not learn immediately from this description of these attributes of God, that they also exceed all our powers ? There is nothing in our whole nature by which they can be imitated : and neither in mightiness nor in knowledge, nor in omnipresence, can finite man assimilate himself to that which is infinite. Our weakness prohibits our execution of such works as he performs ;—our ignorance does not allow us to scan his knowledge, much less to reach it ;—and our limited nature must be confined to certain places, and is incapable of being in every place as the Lord is. How then could we presume to follow the example of God in these perfections ? Who would set before him as a model, his eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, and ubiquity, and form after them his modes of cogitation, or of conduct ? With other views God has informed us of these his attributes ; not to imitate them in our conduct, but

to become the subject of our thoughts, that we may praise, admire, and spread abroad the honour and renown of our Creator. They are to be the basis of our hope, our confidence, our consolation, and our refuge ; they are to excite a holy veneration in our hearts, and impress our souls with an immoveable assurance of his gracious succour in all our necessities ; and, by their means, the mind is to be drawn away from the service of vanity, and the will is to be deterred from the lusts of the flesh. What a comfort it is to those who are in need, that God is omnipotent ; and never was the most afflictive dispensation so great as not to allow the power of the Deity to afford assistance to be greater and mightier ! What an admonition to those who are secure and unrepentant, that God is omniscient, and that all their thoughts and wishes, and all their paths and actions are observed by a righteous Judge, who does not relinquish, although he stays his vengeance ! And what an exhortation to holiness and virtue, as well in solitude as in public,—as well in heart as in expression and external demeanour, that God is omnipresent ! He conducts us from step to step ; he sees us in the darkest corner, and he follows us to the inmost recesses of our lonely habitations. Who then would awaken him to anger by secret transgressions, although they were not noticed by the world ? Thus the former division of the divine attributes serves for our improvement, although not

for our imitation. We can be encouraged by them to act providently, and to pay attention to religion; but they do not teach us by what method our mind can be formed to a resemblance of the image of God; and they furnish us with no pattern that, in our weak and infirm nature, could be adopted for improvement.

God will only be imitated by his upright worshippers with respect to those perfections which pertain to him in consequence of his spiritual nature. What their spirit can have in common with his, although in a lower degree, in that he requires that they should select him for an example, and follow his footsteps: it is possible for us to pursue holiness and virtue; for, by a proper use of the means of grace, our soul is endowed with a capability of subduing evil inclinations, and is excited to the love of truth; therefore God has set forth his own holiness, his abhorrence of sin, and his pleasure in that which is good, as a model which we ought to try to imitate. It is not impossible, while we are in a state of mortal life, to be endued with Christian wisdom; to deal righteously; to overcome the malice of our foe; to exercise beneficence towards the distressed; or to perform other virtues of a similar nature, which are well-pleasing to the Deity; therefore he commands us to be wise, righteous, compassionate, and tenderly affectioned, as himself. Our spirit is gifted with a thinking understanding,

and with a free power to resolve, or a will. It is formed in the image of God for righteousness and holiness, and consequently is not destitute of the necessary capacities for receiving that virtuous formation of mind which He desires; and here his own Word is an encouragement and guide, for from him those virtues derive their origin and are grounded in his essence. In these attributes he is a model for the faithful which can be imitated, because grace renders them fit to effect this, and nature meliorated by conversion, no longer impedes, or arrests their industry. You now see, my Christian brethren, what are the divine attributes which ought to be copied by the real worshippers of God: they ought to be observant of his wisdom, and be led, by that means, to a course of sanctity and foresight: they ought to direct their attention towards his holiness, to discover how sin should be abominated and piety esteemed: they ought to place before them his tender compassion, that they may be moved to loving-kindness and mercy towards the miserable condition of the indigent; and they ought to ponder his righteousness and his stern anger towards ungodly scoffers, who deride or neglect his proffered means of deliverance, in order to see how zealously truth and rectitude should be defended against falsehood and against injustice. The wisdom, holiness, righteousness, and good-

ness of God, are then the attributes which he wishes to become the model of imitation for his worshippers. But let us consider more accurately, in the second head,

In what respect, and after what manner, these attributes of the Deity should be imitated. But is it required by the similarity at which we ought to aim, that our virtues should correspond with the divine perfections in purity and splendour? Should our holiness be analogous to that of the Divinity in degree and magnitude, and should our goodness or loving-kindness be elevated to the same height as those of the Father who is in heaven? What a request! both unworthy of God, and inconsistent with the feeble nature of the human species. Even our forefathers in their state of innocence could not attain to a perfect likeness of the Supreme Being: their wisdom was noble and devoid of imperfection; but it was limited: on the contrary, God is at all times equally infinite in wisdom and in judgment. Their holiness was clean and uncontaminated, but it was circumscribed: it could increase and decrease; it could be augmented or diminished, and it required daily support. In God, on the contrary, holiness is of the same compass as the remainder of his attributes: he is infinitely holy and so completely free from sin, that he could not possibly commit it. His holiness is one of his essential characters, and

it is hostile to his lofty nature to think evil, or to will that which is injurious. Then as man in his primeval innocence could not imitate the divine perfections in their magnitude and splendour, being lower, infinitely lower than God, although in his perfect form he bore the image of the Deity; how much less ought we to expect to arrive at a resemblance of Him now, without a distinguishable inferiority? And how infinitely are we beneath Him now, as sin has corrupted us, wickedness has defiled, and a concomitant depravity has defaced the glorious features with which we were originally formed? Who can boast in the sight of the Omniscient that he has even one perfect and unpolluted virtue? We are beneficent towards our fellow-men; we remove the load of the miserable; we feed the hungry, and we clothe the naked; this we do after the precept of Jesus, to imitate the Father in loving-kindness and in mercy: but on that account are we as merciful as God himself? Can our goodness, although fashioned according to the model which he has given us, be considered as noble, perfect, clean, and unspotted as that which he evinces daily towards us and our brethren? How often is the beneficent mind distracted by an invading disgust, although without design! The indigent encompass us in crowds, and exhaust our patience. How often self-esteem can persuade

us to an adulatory self-commendation ! But with all our promptitude, do we not nevertheless often neglect to succour him, by whom such succour is required ;—to do for the advantage of others that of which our faculties make us capable ;—and to avail ourselves of the talents entrusted to us by Providence at the fittest season, and with the wisest, and the most useful design ? But is our holiness more immaculate, our wisdom more provident, or our righteousness more free from imperfection ? Even here we must confess with the Psalmist, “ Lord, if thou art strict to mark what is done amiss, who can abide it ? And enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”—Psalm cxliii. 2. The man of piety has a sincere abhorrence of sin, but still he often feels a secret desire which burns within his heart, and would willingly burst forth. He loves rectitude, and is disgusted at all injustice ; but even on this side also, the flesh seeks for an occasion to be his tempter. With the best intentions, we have frequently offended, through a defect of prudence and precaution ; the good that we would, that we do not, through carelessness ; but the evil that we would not, that we do, through precipitation. Why need I prove more amply, how little the best Christian can attain to the most exact conformity

with the divine perfections? When we are ordered to be followers of God, as dear children; to be holy as he who has called us; to be perfect as our heavenly Father; — has He then also exacted the most inconsistent similarity between him and us? No! He saw our weakness; he was acquainted with our incapability, and knew how great was our imperfection. Of what service was it then for him to impose duties which could not be performed? The Sovereign Lord does not require of sinners, that they should follow his example, in order to approach the grandeur and the dignity with which he himself is encompassed. His intention is more compatible with our present state. It is his desire that we should imitate those of his attributes which appertain to him in consequence of his spiritual nature, and some of which may have a place in a thinking soul: those he wishes we should imitate as far as grace gives strength, and Jesus will advance us by his word: first, as a sure and un-fallacious rule, according to which our modes of thought and conduct can be best adjusted; secondly, as an infallible token, by which our real mental character can be most securely determined, and thirdly, as the most powerful means of encouragement to zeal, and a steady progress in holiness and virtue. The attributes of God will then become an unerring rule, according to which

our modes of thought and conduct can be best adjusted. The word prescribes us our duties with perspicuous expressions in plain precepts; but by what method they can be observed; how easy is their execution; from what side they are to begin; under what circumstances, and in what form and fashion they are to be accomplished:—this is to be learned more by example than commandment. Mere injunctions work with inferior energy on the mind; but examples give greater vitality to knowledge: they advance us in the paths of virtue, and persuade us to engage in the pursuit of that which otherwise we had scarcely presumed to do. On that account the Scriptures refer the true worshippers of God to shining patterns of virtue and of holiness: they command them to act virtuously, but prove also how such actions are performed by others in order to excite them to a more earnest desire and a more ardent zeal. Thus Jesus exhorts us in the Gospel—“Be ye merciful!” but shows us also, how this mercy ought to be evinced, namely, as your Father is merciful. The example of the Father will lead us to correct notions of the compassion which we owe to our neighbour: we ought to consider *His* conduct towards afflicted and unhappy sinners, to learn from it what ours should be when we would show mercy unto those who are in sorrow. The heavenly Father took compassion on fallen

mankind, and determined to deliver them without any view to his advantage, or to his remuneration. Thus the sincere Christian ought neither to inquire after his own gain, nor aim at being requited, when he is bountiful unto his neighbour: he ought to assist him, through mere pity, without the hope of any recompense, simply to save him from the threatening ruin. The heavenly Father took compassion on his enemies, and ransomed those who had provoked him by voluntary disobedience; and thus the genuine worshipper of God ought not to deprive his adversary of the needed succour; his pity must extend itself to all those who are in necessity; and without any exception of friend or foe, he ought to aid and support his neighbour in his penury, as far as his abilities allow him. You see by this, how the attributes of God are a rule for our modes of thought and conduct; and then first could we hope to live exactly according to his commandments, when we meditate on his own example, and endeavour to imitate it as far as it is possible for a mortal to do while here in life, with the co-operation of the Spirit. Christ, the Saviour, in particular, in his conduct which was suited to the will and counsel of God, and in consistence with his high perfections, has left us the best example, the most secure plan, and the clearest method for the exercise of piety. He was holy, merciful, righteous, good and

wise, like the Father. Let us follow his steps; then we advance to meet the Father, and approximate ourselves to his likeness, for the Son performed his works.

But the divine attributes are likewise an infallible criterion by which our real disposition can be best determined. Nothing can be of more importance to us than to be rendered certain respecting our spiritual temper; whether we be worthy of the society of God and partakers of his paternal loving-kindness, or if our souls be excluded from the affection which is felt for none, but for the faithful? In order to satisfy ourselves with regard to this momentous consideration, we ought to put our internal condition to the test and search it according to certain tokens: but what characteristic is more unerring than that which shines forth from the attributes of the Most High? As a Christian I will be merciful and really sympathizing. But am I so? How shall I judge if my compassion be more the offspring of natural humanity than of true religion? How shall I ascertain if my love towards my neighbour be more restricted than it ought to be? Here I have nothing to do, but to turn my thoughts to the mercy of the heavenly Father. How kindly has God favoured me with the richest blessings, although I did not merit them, and how anxiously he provides for my welfare, and frees me from

the utmost misery? But with the same willingness have I poured out my donations upon those who suffered want, according to my capability? Have I followed the Father as an example, and without an exemption of friend or enemy, have I relieved the children of distress? Scarcely will such an inquiry be instituted before the conscience gives a verdict: and it is just, because it is conformable to the clearest, the most infallible criterion, the attributes of God.

Lastly, these will be our most powerful incentives to a continual advancement in sanctity and virtue. Our God is holy, bounteous, merciful, righteous and wise. He will love us as children, acknowledge us as heirs, and make us members of his most sacred society, after the conquest of the king of terrors! What precious expectations! What desirable promises! But without resembling him in holiness, goodness, mercy, wisdom and righteousness;—without being actuated by the same thoughts as he is, and without following his example in our conduct, we could not promise ourselves the fulfilment of this hope. Polluted and unclean sinners are unworthy of his society; and he endures not the presence of transgressors. They are his abomination, and he must hate them with abhorrence. With what zeal and manfulness, then, ought we to contend with the seductive blandishments of lust! With what

ardour and courage we should strive to overcome the allurements of the world, and the artful attacks of Satan! and what more powerful stimulus can there be to make us labour for a real sanctification? The holy God will make us eternally happy, when, by faith in Christ and sincere piety, we are cleansed from the impurities of the flesh and of the spirit:—the good God will eternally delight us with the most unutterable joy, when we have learned to imitate his bounty towards our fellow men;—and the merciful Father will have eternal compassion on us, and give us a happiness indescribable, in the blissful mansions above, when we have learned to have such a mind as He has, and have proved ourselves sincerely compassionate towards our necessitous brethren. Dear Christians, be ye, therefore, followers of God as dear children; as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, that at the last ye may be partakers of the incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, which is reserved in heaven for all the sincere adorers of God and Jesus. Amen.

FOR
CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE GLORY OF GOD WHICH WAS MANI-
FESTED TO THE WORLD BY THE NATIVITY
OF JESUS.

THE PRAYER.

LORD, our God and Father! thou eternal and most merciful One, with a lively acknowledgment of thine infinite bounty, we presume this day to bring forward our imperfect offerings of thanks. Lord! thou didst love us with the most wonderful tenderness, when we were deserving of thy wrath. Lord! thou hast pardoned instead of punishing us, and hast glorified thy goodness in a manner that surpasses every expectation. Thou wouldest give us thine only-begotten Son, as a sacrifice for our offences, and thine own image was to be dressed in our weak nature, that by a voluntary passion and obedience, he might satisfy the claims of thy immutable righteousness. Never could mercy and goodness be exalted to a greater perfection. The proofs of it are infinite. Thy whole majesty and glory are revealed to

our eyes, in the great miracle of which, on this day we ought to hold the commemoration sacred. May our lips be but worthy to tune thee a becoming song of praise. Oh, may this cold heart be inflamed with the most ardent desire to diffuse thy glory and celebrate thy name, thou powerful One ! who rulest continually, to emancipate and render happy. Strengthen us in this holy resolution with thy powerful assistance, without which we can do nothing. First, we will prepare ourselves to praise thee in the spiritual prayer, which was prescribed by the Redeemer, and afterwards to elevate our voices to thy praise in the devout hymns of gratitude of the church. Hear us then, Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON VII.

LUKE, ii. 1 — 14.

*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed, &c.**

ALTHOUGH all the works of the Lord bear witness to his sublime perfections, and although all nature exhibits the most evident proofs of the omnipotence, goodness, and wisdom of the Creator, yet there is nothing which can be compared with the especial glory of the Deity, which is manifested to the world in his gracious arrangement for the deliverance of sinners: and what work can be thought greater, or more extraordinary, than the

* My learned and dignified author, who made use of his own version of the portions of the sacred Scriptures on which he discoursed, instead of saying “that all the world should be taxed,” has “that all the inhabitants of the Roman empire should be enrolled or recorded.” Of the diversity of opinions concerning this and the following verse, I need not speak to my enlightened readers. — TRANSLATOR.

nativity of Christ, for the commemoration of which the pious assembling of ourselves, on this day, is appointed. Here is a miracle which surpasses all the astonishing things that have been wrought by the Almighty. God's own Son, the true God, and similar to the Father in essence and in attributes, has assumed human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary; has effected an incomprehensible union between his Godhead and manhood in one person, and has permitted himself to be born as a child, in order to deliver the sinner from the condemnation of which he was deserving. Here is an evidence of love, of which the magnitude cannot be ascertained either by earthly or celestial beings:—unruly subjects, who ought to be punished in consequence of their insurrection against the best of governors, are still the objects of his tender pity, and receive their pardon from his hands, because the Son of God has taken on himself to make a perfect restitution for their delinquencies; and here are a boundless wisdom and judgment which cannot be conceived by the most acute intellectual faculties:—a sinner is released from punishment, and notwithstanding this, sin can be punished; and God displays compassion towards transgressors, and yet none of the strictest claims of righteousness will be relaxed. Yes! we are the adorers of a Lord whose glory angels contemplate with admiration, and which all crea-

tures acknowledge with pious awe :—for the coming of Jesus upon earth has raised his power to infinity, and has glorified his name over the whole reasonable world. How true is that which was testified by our Lord himself, in his spiritual prayer, a short time prior to his passion ! “ O Father, I have glorified thee on earth ; I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world.” — John, xvii. 4, 6. And how correct was the judgment of St. Paul, when he declared, “ that God, who hath commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” — 2 Corinthians, iv. 6. Let us now prosecute this subject with more accurate attention : for it prepares our souls and hearts to bring forth worthy thanksgivings unto the Lord. The Gospel will lead us to consider the following doctrine, and which accords with the design of the festival, that is,

THE GLORY OF GOD WHICH WAS MANIFESTED
TO THE WORLD BY THE NATIVITY OF
JESUS ;

Which is shown,

1st. By the especial ordinances, for which this birth was remarkable ; and

2dly. By the great and momentous purpose for which it was designed.

Both of these considerations will elevate our souls to a holy admiration, and fill our hearts with the most ardent gratitude: as they tend to the glorification of the Creator's honour, and exhibit in their clearest light his high perfections, namely, his omnipotence, wisdom, compassion, and incomprehensible solicitude to work the happiness of ruined sinners:—these beams of the majesty and glory of the Godhead shone on us with redoubled brilliancy when Jesus, the Redeemer, came on earth. Then let us contemplate them,

1st. In the especial ordinances, by which the nativity of our Lord was distinguished.

In this respect, the whole narrative of the Evangelist is deserving of our attention, but on this occasion, I have only time to consider these two circumstances: 1st. The taxing of the Jews, which was ordered that year by Augustus Cæsar; and 2dly. The solemn intelligence of the birth of Jesus that was communicated to the shepherds in the fields by heavenly messengers. In this two-fold arrangement, the most incomprehensible power and wisdom are already conspicuous. Cæsar enjoins a general enrolment of a people, that hitherto had retained their own form of government unrescinded, during the greatest changes of the world; and he

exercises over them an authority which belongs to a lord of a country over his subjects, and every one must give an account of his name, and ability, lineage, and occupation, in order to be included in a public census or taxing, like his other subjects. In former times they had been frequently subdued : now by the mighty Babylonian princes ; then by the governors of Syria ; and the Romans themselves had reduced them to obedience, before Augustus had been invested with the insignia of authority ; but still, amid these distresses, they did not lose the privilege of being a distinct nation, ruled by its own magistrates ; they were captives or vassals, but not properly subjects, and were obliged to obey those who were set over them, who, in their turn, were under the necessity of performing the conditions which had been imposed on them by the conqueror, as a mark of his supreme domination. Now, on the contrary, at the nativity of our blessed Saviour, a foreign ruler begins to treat them as their lawful lord. Herod is king, but still Cæsar commands the Jews in his own name, and lays upon them duties, to which they had hitherto been unaccustomed. The Evangelist calls taxing the first duty : in the second, which was put into execution not long after, they were obliged to be submissive to public imposts, and scarcely had there been a lapse of

ten years, before the land was transformed into a province, or territory of the Roman empire.

Had not then St. Luke reason to mention an important occurrence at the birth of Christ, which produced the most considerable alterations in the Jewish state? In order to determine the epoch with the greater accuracy, he even notices the name of the governor who was sent out from Rome to regulate the taxing. Cyrenius was the ambassador extraordinary, who, under the character of governor of the country, was to take an account of the inhabitants of Syria, and those of Palestine among them; both countries being reckoned together at that time, while another, who bears a different name in history, performed the common duties of the ruler. So fully has the Evangelist described all the circumstances relative to this enjoined enrolment! and it may be easily discovered that he is desirous of representing it as an event peculiarly remarkable respecting the nativity of Jesus. He has the same inducement to relate another occurrence, and which ought not to be set aside without consideration, any more than the other. The pregnant Mary, who expected her delivery at her usual residence at Nazareth, was under the necessity of preparing herself for an unanticipated journey in consequence of

the mandate of Cæsar, and to give birth to her offspring at a place which she had no idea of visiting.

We need only consider these particulars with suitable attention, and the weakest understanding will not mistake in them an especial operation of the Deity: but, with a little consideration and reflection, we could easily discover all the wisdom and the mightiness with which the Supreme Being is wont to characterize his most extraordinary actions. Who does not perceive that the nativity of our blessed Lord, under these circumstances, is a most exact fulfilment of the predictions of the holy prophets? “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,” said the dying Jacob to his assembled children, “nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.”—Genesis, xlix. 10. Now, the same year that Jesus came into the world the Jews are despoiled of the last remains of their former liberty, and are really embodied among those who owed obedience to the power of Rome. “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah,—this was the prophetic language of Micah,—yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel.”—v. 2. Jesus was conceived at Nazareth, but was born unexpectedly in Bethlehem. What evidences of the divine fore-knowledge! So many centuries beforehand the Deity had permitted these events

to be promulgated, and had determined their certainty ! So exactly was he acquainted with things the most remote, which could be discovered by no finite understanding, because they were founded on circumstances which were fortuitous, and partly dependent on the option of mankind ! What tokens of the mighty and wise government of Providence ! Until the appointed time the Almighty preserves the statutes of his people unabrogated : but at the instant that he had fixed for that purpose, from eternity, a foreigner is allowed to violate them, and God actuates him to put his plan into execution in that very year in which the Saviour came to dwell among us. It is known that this taxing had been long meditated by Augustus, but that he found no opportunity to accomplish it, before it was consistent with the will of God, and the same Almighty power guides the hand of Cæsar, when he expedites his order. The Lord appointed him to make the classification of a people according to their lineage, and that every one should be taxed in his own city, and this obliges Mary to repair to Bethlehem, although she was in a state unfit for travelling, that the prophecy relative to the birth of the Child of Promise might be fulfilled.

How great then are the mightiness and power of the Lord, whose simple nod can arrest the decrees of potentates ;— can turn their counsels ;—

can command them to put his will into execution, and can remove all the impediments which prevent the performance of his designs ! But how similarly great and infinite are his understanding and his wisdom ! He would arrange these events, to fix on an immoveable foundation, that truth on which our everlasting happiness depends, to convince us by the most manifest evidences, that the new-born Jesus of Nazareth, in whose person all the promises would harmonize, is the true Messiah ;—he would combine the Jews with the Romans under one sovereign, to open a communication between them, and by that means promote the diffusion of the precious doctrine which Christ was to promulge, to every corner of the known world ;—and he would signalize the Saviour's birth by such remarkable occurrences as have the most perceptible influence on the generality of men, in order to distinguish him as a personage of extraordinary elevation and dignity, for the sake of whom the Deity himself had pre-ordained the most important alterations. But should not these circumstances impress our souls with a profound veneration for the omnipotence and wisdom of the Most High, and penetrate our hearts with the most internal joy and gratitude ? By this we are assured, that the advent of the Messiah was the operation of God himself ; an evidence of his perfections and a proof of his all-effective mightiness ; and here we

have an adequate sign, in which the high destination of the Son to spread abroad the honour of the heavenly Father is clearly visible?

Still, the other arrangement at the birth of Christ, to which we have proposed to turn our view, is not less remarkable. The Almighty sends out a celestial Spirit to announce it to the shepherds in the fields, and a band of angels solemnize it with triumphant songs of joy. Not simply the festivities themselves, of which the splendour obscures our most magnificent exhibitions, shall here engage our attention:—it is true, that it presents to our senses an affecting evidence of the extraordinary character of Jesus, and awakens in our minds the most elevated ideas of the especial respect and love which were evinced for him by the Deity; but this alone shall not arrest our thoughts: for the wisdom also which shines forth from this event is peculiarly deserving of our admiration, and to inquire into it is to prepare ourselves for new thankfulness. Wisely did the Lord permit the nativity of our Saviour to be known immediately, and poor and lowly shepherds were wisely appointed to receive the intelligence: “the same night the angel of the Lord stood suddenly before them as they were abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks, and communicated to them the good tidings of great joy;” and, as eye witnesses, they were to corroborate, when Jesus

manifested himself in his years of manhood, that this was He who had been sent from heaven. Their testimony of the celestial pomp, which decorated his advent upon earth, was to stamp on those who had not known him from his earliest youth, a due respect for his person, and to make them attentive to his preaching. With a painful anxiety, many pious men were now in expectation of the hope of Israel, and for their sakes also the angels might inform the shepherds of the arrival of the promised Saviour. What they had seen and heard is soon tried by a common rumour : for they forgot not to publish it the following day among their friends, who, in their turn, carried it farther : but the godly-minded Israelite received their intelligence with consideration, and treasured it in a consolatory hope. On this account he paid a more willing attention to the exhortations of the Baptist in after-times ; meditated more accurately on the characteristics of the approaching Messiah, which had been predicted by the inspired servants of the Almighty ; and at last he was more ready to acknowledge the Redeemer in his public ministry, to be what he really was, without being hindered by prejudice. So useful was it for God to divulge the Saviour of the world, as soon as he was born, to certain men, who might also communicate the necessary intelligence to others, and this is a fresh confirmation of that which we have

learned already, that wisdom presides over all the operations of the Deity. Perhaps it may be asked, what was the reason that this important piece of information was not communicated by the angel either to the inhabitants of Jerusalem or to the Sanhedrim? Perhaps also the idea may occur, that such a disclosure of the event would have produced a more considerable effect, and would have induced the whole nation to hasten out to receive the new-born Messiah with veneration. But what impression could the truth have made, either on the disposition of Herod or on the prevailing modes of thinking of the times? The question answers itself, and these doubting suggestions are put to flight, at the first view which we take of the existing condition of Jerusalem. Of a rival in his kingdom, Herod was apprehensive, but the Sanhedrim and the populace expected a princely hero. Jesus lying in a manger and wrapped in the garb of poverty would have been a scandal to both parties: a victim to the blood-thirsty suspicion of the king, and a stumbling block to the arrogant minds of the people: the former would have robbed him of existence, and by the latter he would have been scorned. Was it not wiser then to secrete his infancy, rather than to intrust it to the violence of those who would annihilate the object of his mission? It is even a glorification of the wisdom of the Deity,

that he sent his angel not to the superior classes of the Jewish nation, who were every where corrupt, and immersed in ungodliness ; but unto lowly and poor shepherds, whose habits of life kept them from heinous sins ; whose simplicity preserved them from vain desires and prejudices ; and whose sincere devotion, innocent conduct, and genuine rectitude, confirmed their credibility, and rendered their testimony admissible by others. They would be the best propagators of the rumour among the lower orders, who had still some remains of virtue and religion, even in the most inconsiderable villages far distant from the capital ; and by them the longing of the sincere could be best satisfied, as their humble station precluded the possibility of their being suspected of self-interested views in this occurrence. Such is the manifestation which is made of the glory of God in the especial ordinances, by which the nativity of the Son is distinguished. Every thing testifies his supreme power and dominion over heaven and earth, angels and mankind ; over all that is assembled in the world, the greater and also the more minute ; and over all our thoughts and resolutions. This is a complete glorification of his wise and incomprehensible understanding, which foresees the best method of attaining the best object ; which predetermines the most useful means ; and knows the most occult impediments, and how to obviate them by precaution. But

these attributes are brought into action to illustrate the dignity of the Son, and to establish our confidence in him; and God displayed his perfections in all their brightness at the birth of Christ, to designate him as the author and the basis of our eternal happiness, with infallible tokens of a divine co-operation. May then the grateful heart raise the most ardent thanksgivings; for to be destitute of feeling here is a scornful contempt of the Deity: and may our affected souls burst forth in moving hymns of praise; for to refrain from giving honour to the Lord on this occasion is the most disgraceful species of ingratitude! Still there is one proof remaining of the glory revealed at the Saviour's birth, which surpasses all the grandeur that has hitherto fallen beneath our observation. It is this which shows itself,

2dly. In the great and momentous purpose for which the nativity of the Redeemer was designed.

This also the angel announced in the name of the Lord to the shepherds in the field. "Fear not," says he, "for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be unto all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord."—Ver. 10, 11. How precious is this assurance! How consolatory and joyful for the sore-afflicted soul who feels her own infirmity! For the advantage and good of

sinners, the Son is come into the world, dressed in our nature, that he may bring them a double benefit, both as a Saviour and a Lord. He was destined by God, and self-appointed, to be the deliverer of a ruined race, to release them from the miserable consequences of the fall, namely, a merited anger of eternal continuance, the dominion of Satan, and the despotic sway of sensuality. God ordained him to be a Lord and Ruler over all those whom he redeemed; to defend them against their spiritual enemies; to forward them in godliness, by his powerful assistance, and to help on, and advance them to an actual participation in the blessedness which he had purchased. Jesus is born to die, and through him we shall live;—he dies to become our sovereign, and from him we shall receive our beatification; he is man to recall our nature to its human dignity, and he is our brother to incorporate us, as his joint-heirs, into the kingdom of his Father. Ah! this is a depth of compassion and of love which cannot be fathomed by the highest of created Spirits. Conscience called for vengeance; righteousness threatened; the sinner was a victim to the wrath of the Almighty, and death stood ready armed for his destruction. Oh, miserable men! Who could deliver us from this most cruel state of desperation? Even the last, although uncertain resolution, was torn from us;—even an earnest repentance of our sins surpassed

our strength. Sufferings and inclinations were alternate; we must be apprehensive of the former, and follow the latter with an anguished appetite, because the powers of the soul were rendered subject to the wild suggestions of the senses. A piteous condition! and it was similarly formidable unto all, because it extended itself to all, without any exception. Who trembles not at the bare retrospect of this misery? But still, would that it were more frequently recollected by us, that we might be deterred from the voluntary bondage of evil propensities! Or rather, would that it never were forgotten, that the tempter may not again fetter us in the former slavery, from which the merciful and benign Creator was desirous of rescuing us, when he sent down his Son to earth, and permitted him to be born in the fashion of a man: “for God so loved the world, that he gave us his only begotten Son, to the end that we might not perish, but have everlasting life!”—John, iii. 16. And therefore our affectionate and compassionate Saviour determined to ransom us with his innocent blood; for, according to his own avowal, “he was come to give his life, as a ransom for many.”—Matt. xx. 28.

Compare, then, the present deliverance with that misery, and judge if the goodness which God evinced towards us by the incarnation of his Son be not infinitely superior to all the elevated and

the excellent things which can be imagined by the understanding! Now the conscience of the believer is appeased, and righteousness no longer menaces, as a mediator is born for us, to put an end to condemnation, and to make an atonement for our transgressions. Now the fearful anticipation of death is exchanged for a consoling hope in those who are in misery:—peace and joy will eternally surround the sincere Christian, in the blissful mansions which the Redeemer went away to prepare for his virtuous worshippers, and no longer will the infirmity of nature keep back the amendment of our hearts: for the blessed Lord, who consented to be born, to die in our stead, has appointed adequate means against the predominance of carnal desires, and strengthens the fainting spirit to sustain a bold conflict with the seductive blandishments of the tempter. Reason is emancipated from her disgraceful thralldom under the despotic dominion of the senses; the darkness of error is dispelled; open abominations are diminished; virtue is protected; vice is covered with confusion; and without any exception arising from a difference of nation or lineage, situation or condition, the road to a better life, after this, is opened unto all the penitent. Such is the mighty deliverance which was effected by the eternal Son of God, when he united himself with human nature in one person!—This is the momentous purpose

for which the Father had ordained his glorious birth, and for this cause the pious aged Simeon acknowledged him as the "salvation of the Lord."—Luke, ii. 30. The apostle Peter described his day as "the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;"—Acts, iii. 19; and St. Paul testified that "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—Rom. v. 8. Thus then they have represented his assumption of flesh as the most exalted benefit for the human race, and one in which God had displayed the clearest proofs of his pitiful loving-kindness, and had glorified his inscrutable compassion; but in considering him in this light, we are not simply justified by their concurrence, for our own experience obliges us to make a similar confession. What strengthens the courage with which a dying Christian approaches the frightful mansion of the grave; except this, the only consolation, built on the worthiness and merits of the Saviour, that the soul will be taken under the protecting providence of a loving and a sympathizing Father? And what will sustain us under the burden of the cross, or mitigate the smarts and agonies which are occasioned by adversity, except the hope which was confirmed by Jesus, that a reward is laid up in the eternal state, greater and more excellent than all the good things which are the property of the world? Thus of ourselves

we experience the salutary effects of the mercy of the Deity, and our own hearts must give their assent, in consequence of a sensible conviction that Christ is born for our felicity and freedom, because God was gracious, and loved us infinitely with the most marvellous affection.

We have seen, my devout brethren, in what manner the glory of the Lord is manifested by the advent of the Son. The highest power, an indescribable wisdom, and an unsearchable goodness and compassion, (the most perceptible attributes of the divine essence,) shine forth in all their radiance, partly in the especial occurrences by which this nativity was distinguished, and partly in the mighty and important purpose for which it was intended. It is scarcely necessary for me to use more persuasions to excite the upright to praise and to thanksgiving, for who is the senseless and the simple one that can listen to the greatest proofs of the incomprehensible care of the Deity to make the children of perdition blessed, and not be roused to warmest gratitude? Thus may every grateful and awakened heart unite its pious sighs unto my prayers, and in the name of Jesus, the Redeemer, we will bring the offering of our lips before our merciful God, with devotion and veneration.

Thanks be to thee, thou Lord of glory, and mighty Ruler of the universe! thanks be to Thee, our gracious and compassionating Father; that

thou hast appointed thy Son to be our Saviour ; —that thou, in and through him, hast revealed to our eyes thy high perfections,—and that, by this incomparable means, the wonderful nativity of Christ, thou hast provided for our deliverance from the utmost danger, and hast elevated our souls to acknowledge thee in thy supreme dignity, for our own happiness. With adoration we prostrate ourselves before thy throne of grace, and confess that thou art a God above all gods, infinite in thy essence, and incomprehensible in thy operations. Our tongues shall diffuse thy praises among the nations of the earth, and our hearts shall be continually consecrated as a temple for Thee, and thy dear Son, in union with the Holy Ghost : all Three, our supreme Benefactor, our God and our Preserver. O Lord ! we have received innumerable blessings from the fulness of thy mercy ; again thou hast ennobled our degenerate nature, and hast vouchsafed to give us thy most immediate society in our exalted Brother. Grant us understanding to be mindful of this grace hereafter, and hearts to acknowledge it with lively thanksgivings, and also give us strength to testify our gratitude in life and conduct, as thy obedient and thy faithful subjects : until thou hast admitted us into the kingdom of thy honour, to a contemplation of thy glory, face to face. Amen.

FOR THE TENTH

SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CERTAIN AVENGING CONSEQUENCES OF
A CONTINUAL ABUSE OF THE DIVINE LONG
SUFFERING.

THE PRAYER.

MERCIFUL Father! how great and incomprehensible art thou in thy long endurance of our sins! Thy paternal heart has poured out the fulness of its bounty; and thy tender compassion has proved itself to be wonderful. So long hast thou spared us and our fathers from condign chastisement! yes, thou hast overpowered us with blessings, when we were the least deserving of them. How often hast thou allured us by thy benignant benefits, to follow thy bounteous precepts, but in vain! How little are we improved, even if not deteriorated, since the time that thou ceasedst to punish us! O Lord! hast thou determined to visit us early with the more tremendous vengeance, because we have so long increased our debt of sinfulness by the abuse of thy long suffering? Will thy righteous

arm be extended at last to destroy that people among whom thou hast so often glorified thy mercy? Yes! this is merited by our misdeeds, of which the number is incalculable. Wert thou to overtake us with the desolation of Jerusalem, we should have nothing of which to complain, except our own ingratitude, which has ascended to its very summit. Of ourselves we dare not deprecate the impending punishment; for our lips are void of purity. But Jesu! dearest Saviour! be our advocate. Thine all-holy blood, which was effused to make restitution for our sins, shall be our shield; and thy merits and powerful supplications can be our only protection. Still may the powerful admonition of thy Spirit, by the word, incline our hearts to a sincere repentance of our sins; and teach us to consider our own advantage. Deliver us, Lord! from the chastisement of vengeance, and allow mercy to take the lead of righteousness. We beseech thee in confidence in thy own atoning passion and death. In thy name we humble ourselves, with the same prayer before thy Father's throne. Hear us, Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON VIII.

LUKE, xix. 41—48.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it,

Saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes, &c.

THAT a righteous God must hate sin and punish wicked deeds according to their merits, is confessed by every one who has learned, by the aid of scriptural evidence, to judge accurately relative to the divine attributes. But how few are those on whom this acknowledgment can produce its full effect! It ought to deter sinners from determined transgressions. It ought to arrest the ungodly in their rash career, and actuate them to a speedy repentance; as nothing can be more insensate than to run towards an evil which could be prevented by precaution. Notwithstanding this, the great multitude advance with firm steps in the paths of pleasure, regardless of the impending misery.

We know that punishment awaits on sin, but prosecute it still without alarm;—we hear the fearful denunciations of the law against the voluntary slaves of wickedness;—we foresee the coming vengeance, and we observe the anger of the Judge by palpable admonitions; but the mind is too hardened to receive or retain their impression. It continues to cherish its dangerous propensities, and is alive to nothing but the present delight, without heeding the subsequent calamity. Of this Solomon has assigned the right cause, and it is confirmed by experience: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,” says he, “therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”—Ecclesiastes, viii. 11. Because, at the very instant of the commission of the sinful act, the Deity does not visit with sudden vengeance, but withholds it through relieving compassion, therefore the bold sinner meditates incessantly on the gratification of his criminal inclinations, and advances from sin to sin with undaunted obstinacy. Transgressors pervert the divine forbearance to a support for their security: and voluptuaries take occasion from the manifested mercy, to increase their wickedness: thus, that which should improve us is abused to cause an augmentation of our guilt. How little does this simple generation understand how to consider its own advantage; and how ill re-

munerated is the incomprehensible mercy which God evinces towards the servants of sin ! He spares them through tenderness, because he is desirous of their salvation ; but they counteract his best designs by the contumacious hardness of their hearts :—and He inflicts not instant vengeance, in order not to deprive them of time to repent them truly of their sins ; but they despise the riches of his long suffering, and will not learn that kindness should impel them to amendment. Thus to make an abuse of the tender compassion and love of the merciful Father is, at last, deserving of being punished with the greater vengeance. Sin is doubly abominable, because it discovers a most ungrateful heart. The holy will of the Divinity is not merely transgressed deliberately and through wickedness ; it experiences the same fate from contempt of, and insensibility towards the most affectionate admonitions, and the evil is not merely reiterated with pleasure and with inclination : no ! it is repeated after the long-continuing indulgence and countless evidences of favour of a pitying Judge. Is it then wonderful, that the long-suffering One should eventually prove himself righteous ? For these children of ungodliness he destines the most severe tribulations, and commands his judgments to bring them to desolation ; although the Lord delays his coming, still “ he will not absent himself for ever.” The

Saviour's mournful address to obdurate Jerusalem, in the Gospel for the day, announces to us

THE CERTAIN AVENGING CONSEQUENCES OF
A CONTINUAL ABUSE OF THE DIVINE LONG
SUFFERING.

Let us then consider,

1st. Man's continual abuse of the divine long suffering ;

And then examine,

2dly. The testimonies which make it indubitable that the divine vengeance will be consequent upon such an abuse.

1st. To describe this abuse, is a topic which cannot be equally grateful unto all, because it reminds the multitude of their failings ; but to neglect the opportunity which I am offered by the Gospel, to stimulate their slumbering consciences, would be criminal in me, of whom it is the duty, according to the injunction of St. Paul, " to preach the word ; be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, and exhort" my hearers.— 2 Tim. iv. 2. A rightly disposed Christian is never grieved at serious admonitions ; because they serve him as a caution against carnal security ; but the unrepentant and thoughtless lovers of the world constantly require them, and they ought

to know themselves, for the purpose of not being deceived by an imaginary righteousness. But could the bitter expostulation which our blessed Lord poured forth over Jerusalem be also made over us and our cities? And have we continued even unto this very day to abuse the long suffering of the Deity? Before these painful questions can be answered, we ought to inquire, in what especial proofs this divine long suffering is principally apparent; and in what different methods it is commonly abused by mankind, from time to time. Both parts can be illustrated by the example of the Jews in the Gospel for the day. The Deity had long manifested peculiar proofs of his long suffering towards the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He had long granted them freedom and a respite from their merited punishment:—He had appointed them rousing warnings and powerful exhortations to repentance:—He had furnished them with the most convenient opportunities, and had offered them the best means for a sincere conversion; but on their side we see nothing, but a continual abuse of the loving-kindness with which he favoured them:—1st. To a carnal and senseless security in the most disgraceful vices; 2dly. To a contumacious contempt for virtue and religion; and 3dly. To a heedless converse with the public worship of the Divinity.

Notwithstanding this, he had long withheld their

merited punishment from the ungrateful Jews. When Jesus bewailed the impending destiny of their city, the people had been long vitiated by evil courses and pernicious prejudices. It is true that they had cast away their heathen idols, and, since the Babylonian captivity, were the worshippers of the real God, according to the law of Moses; but their obduracy of heart, the ancient stigma on the nation, seemed to have undergone no change. Impiety had the ascendancy in every place: and even the teachers themselves, who ought to have guided the simple to accurate knowledge, ran wildly from truth and from religion into the most dangerous extravagancies. But in spite of this, God had spared them during some centuries. They lived in tranquillity under their own governors, after Simon Maccabæus had triumphantly gained them a permanent freedom from the Syrian domination; and the Romans, of whom they were forced to acknowledge the supremacy, a few years prior to the birth of Christ, had neither despoiled them of their former privileges nor weakened their statutes. The Deity kept back its chastisement from the ungodly city, the blood-guiltiness of which exceeded all bounds by the death of Jesus, until forty years after, although in the interval it was inundated with the most abominable iniquities. Yes! the example of that nation has in reality confirmed that which had

been antecedently testified by Jonah after Nineveh was pardoned ; that God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.”—iv. 2. Yes, Lord, in thy forbearance thou art infinite, and devoid of bounds in thy compassion, for thou hast also granted unto us a long continuing respite from our condign correction ! For, my serious brethren, ought not all of us to repeat this acknowledgment, with heart-moved gratitude, that our misdeeds have long called down vengeance on us and on our whole land, but that till now the Lord has been indulgent ? To none of us are known the devastations which result from war : we were born in peace, and have had our lives prolonged, even to old age, beneath her sceptre. The enemy has not plundered our cities, stripped our habitations, or massacred our children or our friends. The husbandman has gathered in the produce of his fields for his own use ; the father and the son successively being unmolested in their toils. The industrious citizen has left behind his treasures for his own posterity, without burying them in the bowels of the earth, through fear of either violence or theft. We are unacquainted with pestilence, and are not tormented by famine. Where is the country in these regions of the world, which can enumerate so many blessings in an unbroken series from generation to generation ? Still, we are not protected in consequence

of virtue and religion. Conscience and daily experience make a contrary attestation. The Lord has screened us from the chastisements of foreign nations; but we have not preserved ourselves unsullied by their sins: He disciplined our forefathers with many grievous dispensations, although they were more zealous in his worship and more blameless in their whole conduct: but he protects us, among whom his precious name is frequently dishonoured, both by vile hypocrites and bold contemners. He defends us against the craftiness of the malevolent and the violence of the persecutor, although we have been long habituated to set aside candour and fidelity, for self-interest, voluptuousness and profusion. But, then, are not our wicked actions displeasing to the holy God? Is he an indifferent observer of the conduct of mankind? Or does he tolerate their offences, because he will not disturb his tranquillity by being their corrector? These infatuated ideas are repelled by David, when he assures us, that “the countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil.” — Psalm xxxiv. 16. And sound reason has always acknowledged, that in consequence of his perfect sanctity, the Supreme Being cannot do otherwise than hate, abominate, and punish all unrighteousness. He hath not justified the conduct of the ungodly, or forgiven the wickedness of sinners, because vengeance is delayed.

He merely is lenient for a time, to evidence his long forbearance.

But what affecting warnings and powerful exhortations to repentance he had appointed for the Jews! How often they were warned by fearful threats; and how often they were admonished by extraordinary benefits! At one time famine was commanded to invade their cities, although it consumed not all of them. The Lord allowed it to rain over one city and not on another: he smote them with blasting and mildew: and the palmerworm devoured their gardens, and their vineyards, and their fig trees, and their olive trees, but yet it brought them not unto repentance.—The pestilence approached their confines; and a numerous band of enemies encircled the uttermost parts of the land.—Amos, iv. 6—10. The prophets menaced them with a speedy desolation; and lastly, with gushing tears, Jesus informed them of their consummate ruin. But neither was Providence sparing of any benefit for their admonition. God visited the earth and blessed it, and made it very plenteous. He crowned the year with his goodness: and his clouds dropped fatness: the folds were full of sheep, and the valleys stood thick with corn.—Psalm lxxv. 9, 12, 14. The poor were fed with the produce of the land, and the wealthy swam in plenteousness. Here also is another proof of the most wonderful forbearance

of the Deity towards a sinful people, and one which, from the most remote ages, he has similarly shown to us. We are often admonished by threatenings, and are called to remembrance by especial benefits.

Not far from our dwellings the flames of war were already kindled, and devastation only waited for its last orders. A contagious murrain among the cattle, the sterility of the soil, and poverty and want of bread in the cottages of the lowly, announced to us the indignation of the Righteous One : and a crowd of impious scoffers had conspired to undermine the welfare of the state and to eradicate the last remains of virtue and decorum : but the Lord hath saved us, as a reeking brand, from the devouring fire. The animosity of the mighty is converted into friendship without the effusion of blood. The sighs of the miserable are exchanged for the loud acclaim of joyfulness ; for blessings return with a two-fold provision, and the plagues are staid. The snares are rent asunder ; the chains which were prepared for us are broken, and calamity has overwhelmed the heads of those who thought to have effected our destruction. Neither fear nor self-interest has hitherto sealed up in silence the lips of the witnesses of the truth, and there are those who in the name of the Deity are continually exhibiting their sins to the impenitent, without respect of persons. Let a man judge for himself then,

whether God has neglected to give us evidences of his long-suffering! What else could he appoint to rouse the conscience from its deep repose, and bring it to reflection? Denunciations should intimidate, but benefits be able to persuade. The Lord would have recourse to every expedient with respect to us, before he ultimately takes vengeance on us according to our merits. Both goodness and severity are used to lead us to repentance, but the chastisement has been withheld, that we might not be snatched away in our transgressions. Ah! this mercy is greater than all our powers to speak our gratitude, but still not sufficient to exhaust the riches of his long forbearance.

The Divinity hath also exhibited his merciful loving-kindness in one proof, by which the antecedent are transcended. To us he has made an overture of the most favourable opportunities, and has afforded the best means for the advancement of repentance. Thus, by his heavenly messengers, he visited Jerusalem with instructive exhortations. In older times, the prophets had announced his sacred precepts; when Christ arrived, the Baptist was sent out to prepare the people for a serious change of mind; and the Saviour came forward among them as a divine Teacher, endowed with super-human qualities, for an affecting and energetic mode of preaching. They

could learn of him what would tend to their temporal and eternal blessedness. He exhorted them to piety and virtue: he inculcated a genuine love of their neighbour, which clears the road to peace and unanimity with others; and he set himself forth as a Mediator and Interpreter between the Deity and themselves, to procure them the remission of their sins, and tranquillity of conscience with regard to the fearful expectations of eternity. They wanted nothing for an entire enlightening relative to all the truths, of which a knowledge is requisite for repentance and salvation. To be edified by his discourse, they never vainly sought the blessed Jesus. To tend to their advantage by his doctrines, he sought *them* in every public place where multitudes were collected, daily and without cessation. The Evangelist certifies, that he “taught daily in the temple.” ver. 47. This was the precious time of visitation, which Jerusalem knew not. Alas! it is but little known, where also it has commenced and has been of long continuance. The same opportunities which are found among the Jews, the Lord hath also granted unto us, and ceaselessly doth He proffer us the same means for the furtherance of our conversion. Although He addresses us not by the mouth of his prophets and apostles, yet still he speaks to us in the Word which they promulged; and although Jesus does not give us immediate instruction

under a visible form in our temples; yet we are the auditors of his own doctrine, illustrated and set forth without human additions. David acknowledged it to be his sovereign good to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit his temple.—Psalm xxvii. 4. An unimpeded, free and rational worship of the Deity was his most inward wish. Oh! that we were as mindful of that good as we ought to be! It is our portion, in preference to innumerable others of our fellow-men, not to be prohibited to search the holy Scriptures, and to put our credence to the test. The divine promises are not hidden from our eyes; they are not perverted by false expositions to ensnare souls; and they are not treated with contempt by the superior classes of society, to the scandal of the populace. From our years of infancy to extreme old age, consolation and relief, instruction and advice, are prepared for every one who will inquire after and receive that which is taught by religion. Devotion retains its honour; the contemner of the Deity does not presume to make him the object of his public defamation; and virtue may expect a recompense, as she is neither destitute of friends nor guardians. Of what do we stand in need, except of an inclination and a will to become effectually improved? Opportunities are abundant, and there

is an adequacy of means. It is clear that the divine long-suffering has evinced itself in especial proofs towards us and our fellow-citizens. It has given us a long respite from the punishment of which we are deserving; it has appointed us pathetic warnings and powerful admonitions, and by glorious means it has endeavoured to forward our conversion.

But with equal sincerity let us examine and acknowledge by how many different methods these divine favours are abused among us. Threefold was the abuse which had the mastery among the Jews. The most general showed itself in a carnal and infatuated security. Jesus laments over Jerusalem; “the things which belong unto thy peace are now hid from thine eyes.” That is, “blinded by thine earthly wishes and desires, thou perceivest not what the Deity hath prepared for thy deliverance; and enchanted by the enticing and impure inclinations of the flesh, hitherto thou art wholly insensible both to his menaces and his allurements. Vainly have I endeavoured to dissipate the clouds of ignorance by which thine understanding is enveloped: for thou hast turned away thy vain mind from my doctrine, and hast steeled thy heart against all mine admonitions. All this is hid from thine eyes; for thou observest not the impending danger, but art devoid of terror in thy sins!” It is scarcely necessary for us to inquire, if the same complaints

exist in our days; for it cannot be unknown to us, how trifling is the progress which is made in virtue by the many of mankind. Peace in the land has not produced in the heart the fruits of a sincere detestation of evil, but buries the multitude in the sleep of sin; as if the danger were completely vanished, and no correction left to call up fear. The great events in which we have been warned and called to remembrance by the Divinity are forgotten. Without reflexion the word is heard by many, but by more with an oblivious attention. Immorality is now regarded as a species of politeness; and, according to the old custom, Christianity is acknowledged with the lips: but it profits little to require it in action and in conduct, in mind and modes of thought; this is deferred until a more convenient season. Our solicitude concerning that which is terrestrial, diverts the thoughts from what is heavenly; and our external pleasures, in which one will imitate another, that he may not appear to be in lower life, are the suppressors of the good emotions which may occasionally be felt within us. Wherefore should I conceal your defects with varnished excuses? Or is it permissible to pass over the general corruption in silence, when time and circumstances bid me speak;—when the righteous sovereign Lord again denounces vengeance, and is in readiness, who knows how soon,

to visit both the righteous and the wicked, in consequence of the prevalent security?

Still man's abuse of the divine long-suffering can ascend higher. Among the Jews it manifested itself farther in a contumacious contempt and determined obduracy. This also was a reason why Jerusalem knew not "the things which belonged unto her peace." The great multitude adhered to Jesus to be his auditors, more through admiration of the novel and the unusual in his preaching, than through a longing after more correct information. Quickly were they excited to devotion, and quickly they lost again their pious resolutions. Inconsideration retained the ascendant. But not a few, particularly among those who were dignified, made a determined resistance, and disdained the most excellent doctrines of the Saviour. How lamentable it is that he must thus reprove them publicly; "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"—Matt. xxiii. 37. The Pharisees, the chief priests, the scribes, and the most exalted among the people evinced an open hatred of his person. They jeered at his works, braved his admonitions, and strove to bring his life unto a close, although they were acquainted with his innocence. Still it is more disgraceful that Christendom itself contains a multitude of

such contemners! Men do not blush to mock the precious name through which salvation is prepared for them; they struggle against the truth, and are at variance with the Omnipotent, to pull down the bulwarks with which religion is encircled. Wisdom may cry as formerly by the mouth of Solomon, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" "She has called, and they have refused; she has stretched out her hand, and no man regarded."—Prov. i. 22, 24. We have reason to be thankful to Providence, which, with its powerful arm, has crushed triumphant fool-hardiness, and counteracted the enterprises of the deceiver. Yet would that those scoffers were frequently to call to mind the former misery, in order that they might thence have a better idea of their present deliverance; and that they often returned in thought to their former terror, to be kept with the greater facility from an ungrateful and base scepticism in their present state! By the wise direction of the All-powerful One, fortunately unbelief is restricted. Seldom does it dare to come forward in public societies; and to this day it exempts the simple from open assaults; but on that account it is not destitute of secret worshippers. There are scoffers in the church, of whom St. Peter has predicted, that "they walk

after their own lusts, and ask, with jeering doubt, where is the promise of the Saviour's coming?" —2 Epist. iii. 3, 4. There are voluptuaries and careless ones, who give themselves up to a voluntary obduracy, that they may suppress the corroding reproaches of conscience. There are those who apostatize to indifference for the most important doctrines, and excuse or palliate errors; and again there are others who excite distrust of the credibility of the word, by perverting the clearest evidences according to their own interpretations. So little is the attention which is paid to the especial proofs in which the Lord has displayed his long forbearance; and because anger is not kindled to fearful and immediate vengeance, men forget that He is an equitable Judge, who does not pardon, notwithstanding he respites: they degenerate from security to rebellious disrespect; and steel their minds against every admonition by a resolute audacity.

How little more supportable is the abuse which manifests itself in a heedless converse with the public worship of the Deity! The Gospel adduces a remarkable instance of the light esteem in which the Jewish people held the temple. They converted "the house of prayer into a den of thieves." That holy place where the Eternal would be honoured and adored with divine worship, or the commonly called outer court of the

Gentiles, was thronged with selfish and deceitful men, who enriched themselves by unrighteous traffic, partly with victims for sacrifice, and partly with certain pieces of money which were appointed for the sanctuary. In lieu of prayers and thanksgivings, nothing met the ear but execrations and offensive quarrels; and in lieu of pious thoughts and pious meditations, the heart was filled with criminal desires. There, where devotion and holy awe should be predominant, avarice and craft had fixed their seat; and piety must give way to earthly advantage. But how little more could we boast of our superior intercourse with holy things! Neither are our temples free from an unpermissible abuse. We have lukewarmness in devotion, — a dissipation of the thoughts in worldly cares, under a hearing of the word, — an indifference for the proffered exhortations, — prayers and hymns of praise uttered with cold lips, and without any emotion of the heart. Is not the sanctuary dishonoured by those who frequent it with such a mental disposition? To traffic publicly in the Lord's house, as the Jews did, or, during the service of the Deity, to turn our hearts and thoughts to other transactions which belong to common life, are they not both equally incompatible with a sincere adoration of that great Being? He requires to be adored in spirit and in truth; that

is, in exercises of devotion which are not solely performed outwardly, but which fill the soul with the most internal piety and thanksgiving. Has not Christ himself commanded us to pay such a true and spiritual homage to that God who is a Spirit?—John, iv. 24. A transgression of the Sabbath is become habitual to many; a pious assembling of themselves is neglected without a cause; and the time which was appointed for the worship of the Deity in his sanctuary is consumed in sinful recreations; and the relaxation from labour which is afforded by festivals, is perverted to temerity in evil. It is not unusual, even at this time, for taverns to be crowded with sensual associates, who celebrate this summer season with an offensive joy, while the churches are empty. But the admonitions of the preacher are disdained, because it is believed that there is no cause for his expostulations. Yet what will be the end of all this evil, which is so prevalent, when God's forbearance is at length exhausted? Our Lord has told us in the present Gospel, and predicts a fearful doom upon Jerusalem. "The days shall come upon thee," says he, "that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou

knewest not the time of thy visitation ;” — ver. 43, 44 ; and didst not avail thyself of the opportunity which was afforded thee by the Messiah to obtain the favour and blessing of the Deity. This leads us to the other consideration, where we shall be convinced,

2dly. Of the certain vengeful consequences which result from a continual abuse of the divine long-suffering.

It is no pleasure to me, O ye pious ones ! to keep up your attention with these mournful descriptions. Who can think upon the divine vengeance, without being alarmed and full of fear for his own destiny ? The righteous also may suffer when the Lord visits a corrupted nation ; as we have all reason to tremble at the chastisement of the Almighty, although conscience acquits some among us of deliberate offences. The necessity of our neighbour cannot be indifferent to us if we feel a fraternal affection for him, according to the order of the Saviour ; and neither can the pious man require, that Omnipotence should save him from the common desolation by a miracle. Of what avail then is it to console ourselves or others with flattering hope when misery is lighting on our heads ? In this place particularly, where means are not wanting to cause a prevention of that corruption which is gaining the ascendancy, a seasonable warning of the cer-

tain vengeful consequence is of double utility. I must show first, how the divine vengeance, in consequence of a continual misuse of long suffering, is ultimately manifested; and then, secondly, that the same misuse is infallibly visited by a similar vengeance.

The vengeance of the Deity on sinners is most generally revealed in two ways: it bursts forth either in palpable judgments and external punishments; or shows itself in an abandonment of the obdurate to their own minds which are perverted by pernicious delusions. Both parts are the dreadful but righteous consequences of abused mercy. It is first manifest in sensible calamities and external correction. But who can enumerate them all, or pre-determine that which has been decreed by the Lord? He who governs all nature by his simple nod, and orders all events with boundless power, is neither destitute of arms nor strength, to punish such as treat him with contempt. In the Gospel for the day, Jesus threatens Jerusalem with a numerous host of savage enemies, who would demolish her most massy walls, would lay the city level with the ground, and cause a universal massacre, without exempting those of tender age. To David, whose pride had incensed the Lord, the prophet Gad was ordered to propose three judgments, of which he had his choice: namely, "Seven years of famine, three months'

flight before his enemies, while they pursued him; or three days' pestilence in his land."—2 Sam. xxiv. 12, 13. "The cities of Judah were burnt with fire, and strangers devoured their land, because the Lord was wroth."—Isaiah, i. 7. He threatened Israel by the mouth of Jeremiah, that "he would consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."—xiv. 12; and "fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storms, fulfil his word."—Psalm cxlviii. 8. All created things, which from the beginning were intended for the advantage of men, can be adopted for their injury and chastisement, when it is pleasing unto God. I know not how he will scourge us, neither do I know when; but amid all these dispensations, none can be more afflictive than is merited by our manifold transgressions. Yes! the longer is the respite, the greater is the punishment: for guilt is augmented by an abuse of forbearance. Vengeance shows itself farther in an abandonment of the obdurate to their own minds perverted by destructive delusions. Here again Jerusalem serves us for an example. She was ultimately given up to extravagant ideas, relative to the earthly kingdom of the Messiah, although, during the whole of his ministry, Jesus had fruitlessly testified to the contrary; and she was left to her own blindness, as she had long rejected the clearest evidences of his divine mission, and had long contemned his friendly persuasions. One

false prophet arose after another: artful deceivers, who soothed the wrong ideas of the people, and plunged them into utter misery, with glittering promises. Thus the heathens were cast into the most shameful uncleanness, in consequence of their voluntary opposition to the convictions of reason and the voice of conscience. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.—Rom. i. 28. And the disobedient Christian, who walks in the light with blinded eyes and hardens his heart to a determined resistance, is not free from corrupt errors. St. Paul predicted the doom which is reserved for those who receive not the love of truth, or who reject the gracious promises of the Gospel: “for this cause, God,” says he, “shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”—2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. He does not send it by immediate inspiration, or by teachers regularly appointed for that purpose: then he would himself be the author of the confusion which is occasioned by spurious doctrines, and would tend to the degradation of his sanctity. Men are the inventors of their own inaccurate notions; and God permits them to run into extravagancies, because he prohibits not the use of their powers of mind as they please; that he may not do violence to the freedom of the soul. These

wanderers from the truth diffuse their incorrect opinions with zeal and subtlety. The others, who conceal a secret enmity against the Christian doctrine, because it is adverse to their wicked inclinations, are overcome with admiration for the novel and the extraordinary; take pleasure in it; and fix their faith on the words of the deceiver. But God permits him to insnare them, because they obstinately reject the saving instruction. What St. Paul predicted was fulfilled long since in many parts of the church of Christ. Where the light appeared first, the thickest darkness now predominates. Oh, that it may not invade our borders, and obscure that light which hitherto has thrown its beams on us! Let the signs of the times appear. False prophets raise their daring cries, and talk loudly against the Lord's Anointed. The word of God is assailed, not simply by jeerers whose ridicule is now less detrimental than formerly, because it is the fashion no longer; but by hypocrites and spurious religionists, who set themselves up as the apostles of infidelity, under the name of friends and reformers of Christianity. Our Danish and Northern Church has not been hitherto assaulted. Even unto this day, Providence, through boundless mercy, has kept us from seducement. But how long there will be a continuance of internal tranquillity in the church or of external peace and felicity in the state, will

undoubtedly depend on our amended and more Christian conduct; for the divine long-suffering has unfailingly such a vengeance as its follower.

This has been shown already in the preceding testimonies, in which the Lord has appointed the divers judgments with which the hardened are at length chastised. But all his words are true. Both promises and threats shall be fulfilled. “God is not a man that he should lie, neither the Son of man, that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” This is what the Lord said of himself by the mouth of Balaam.—Numbers, xxiii. 19. Nothing can be more certain than that piety and virtue are favoured with rich blessings; for the heavenly Father has promised the abundance of his mercy to those who walk uprightly before his face; and he does not flatter with false hopes, for he is faithful. But on the contrary also, nothing can be more certain than that audacity and wickedness are requited with heavy chastisements. This is the threat of the Almighty: “if the children of David break my statutes and keep not my commandments, I will visit their offences with the rod and their sin with scourges.”—Psalm lxxxix. 32. But he is true and earnest in his assurances. How then can the sinner promise himself a continual exemption from sensible correction? To save his own honour, the Lord must

punish the ungodly ; and to preserve his holiness from humiliating reproaches, in action he must testify the most perceptible detestation of evil. In correcting transgressors, he is actuated by goodness and by wisdom : otherwise innocence would become the prey of the violence of the mighty, and the proud would forget that he is the Sovereign Lord. Often has the world experienced, that the arm of the Righteous One was stretched out for vengeance, when the measure of wickedness was filled up. Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, and taken by storm ; all her inhabitants were slain or sold for slaves ; their temple was thrown down ; the city was burnt, and levelled with the ground. And where are Nineveh and Babylon ? Where are Tyre and Carthage ? The mighty kingdoms which were the strength of Asia and of Africa, and the terror of Europe ; the great monarchies, before which the earth trembled ; are they not all brought to desolation, through their sins ? Their still-remaining ruins testify that the God of Israel is an omniscient, righteous, and Almighty Judge : for by his prophets he acquainted them with his vengeance, whilst they were in a flourishing condition ; at the appointed time he executed it by his own power : so now they are subverted and are buried in oblivion for ever. None but fools consider these events as mere casualties or the effects of blind destiny. For what are chance and destiny but

empty words which have no meaning when they are separated from the direction of the Deity? And none but the imaginary wise consider them as the necessary and inevitable consequences of the mechanical course of nature. Did not the Creator foresee every possible occurrence before he formed nature? He arranged them altogether after the wisest plan. He saw from eternity that those cities and regions would defile themselves with vices which would cry to heaven; therefore he determined from eternity to punish them at a certain time, and in a certain manner; and he saw that other nations, by powerful warnings, would be brought to reflection; therefore he determined to give them a longer respite from the merited correction. What, in consideration of the foreseen state and conduct of countries, he had decreed, that he executes in due time on every one, when it is found consistent with the counsel which he had established; and thus he rules in all things as an independent Lord. He governs all, and appoints all our events according to his wise pleasure. They are then neither casualties, nor the effects of blind destiny; neither are they the necessary consequences of the mechanical course of nature; but proofs of a ruling Providence, which employs them to warn and to admonish, or at length to avenge a continual abuse of his long-suffering. So many words are here uttered this day,

and so many incitements and exhortations to an unfeigned humility before the throne of grace with prayer and devotion in the name of the Redeemer! Forgive us, O propitiated Father! we have sinned, and are deserving of thy righteous vengeance. Willingly will we improve, and acknowledge thy kindness with lively thanksgivings. Save us, Lord! for the sake of thy mercy, which thou hast always glorified among us by wondrous proofs, and for the sake of thy dear Son, who prays, and advocates our cause before thy face. Amen.

FOR THE FIRST

SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE VICTORY WHICH WAS OBTAINED BY JESUS
FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF SINNERS, IN HIS
CONFLICT WITH THE DEVIL.

THE PRAYER.

WHAT a victory, O dearest Redeemer, hast thou gained over the most powerful enemy of the human race! How judiciously thou hast confounded his craftiness, annihilated his plans, enfeebled his might, and destroyed the dominion which he had arrogated to himself, over the wretched inhabitants of the earth, by the fall of Adam. Now we are plucked out of the snares of the devil, as thou hast rent them asunder and hast restored us our lost liberty. Now we are released from his tyrannical yoke, as in thy victorious contest thou hast shivered to pieces his most mighty weapons. What joy it is for us, that now we ought to withstand all his assaults, with hopes of victory! Through Thee we shall conquer: for thou fightest with us, and strengthenest our weakness. Oh! that we were but grateful for thy

sedulous forethought with worthy thanksgivings! Would that we only knew how to make a right use of the glorious advantage which thou hast gained for the deliverance of the soul! Yet, Lord! by the operation of the Spirit, through the medium of the word, bow down our hearts to obedience unto thee, and teach us to perceive how much greater is the felicity which we could enjoy under thy mild government, than under the slavish yoke of our spiritual enemies. Give us grace to preserve undiminished the freedom which thou hast conferred on us. When we are assaulted, be present with us with thy powerful help; augment our strength and confirm our courage; that the struggle which is begun may be completed to thy honour, but to our ceaseless emancipation from the misery of the condemned in eternity. Would that thou mayest hear our humble request, for the sake of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, and fulfil it, Triune God! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON IX.

MATTHEW, iv. 1 — 11.

*Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness,
to be tempted of the devil, &c.*

THUS the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent that seduced our first parents to disobey the commands of the Almighty; thus Jesus, merely the son of a woman according to the flesh, but begotten by the omnipotence of the Creator without any human agency, shall overcome the seductive designs of the evil spirit, and break the rod of power which he had arrogated to himself over the human race, by means of sin. In the remarkable Gospel for the day, our deliverer commences the momentous contest in which, on our account, he was to engage with the Tyrant of the world. God's first promise to fallen man, that from his flesh and blood should spring a Saviour, endowed with skill and power to fight against his most inveterate opponents, approaches now to its

accomplishment. On this day Jesus dares to make his first struggle, and gains a victory: during the remainder of his time of ministry he continues to weaken the power and reputation of our mighty foe, both by his doctrines and his miracles. He disturbed the kingdom of darkness, in which Satan had long reigned by means of superstition and infidelity. He trembles under the most bitter agony of soul, to discharge the debt of sinners and to rescue them from the violence of the devil. He pours out his blood upon the Cross, as an atonement for the misdeeds which we had wrought, and that on their account the tempter should no longer appropriate to himself a prerogative to torment us. He dies, and God is made propitious; Satan is overcome; the chains of hell are severed; and the original author of wickedness has been despoiled of his authority. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under the feet of the faithful," says St. Paul. — Rom. xvi. 20. What events! the most extraordinary in the innumerable parts of the whole compass of the world! We will now recollect them in our Lent meditations, as an evidence of our sincere gratitude: and what greater unthankfulness can there be than to forget the most important benefits, from which all our happiness both temporal and eternal must be derived? The season enjoins us to remember them with peculiar devotion, and the Gospel gives us an opportunity this

day to investigate one species of them, which, in consideration of its consequences, is deserving of being assimilated to the most momentous. I will comprise the whole narrative of the Evangelist in one chief point of doctrine, according to which I will develop it. We will inquire then

WHAT WAS THE GLORIOUS VICTORY WHICH
JESUS GAINED FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF
SINNERS IN HIS WARFARE WITH THE DEVIL?

In this weighty truth the three following principal considerations are contained :

1st. We ought to learn to know the foe with whom Jesus engaged in war for sinners ;

2dly. We ought to consider the contest in itself ; how it was prosecuted, and terminated triumphantly by the Redeemer ; and

3dly. We ought to illustrate the designs and the benefits of this, his victorious conflict with the most powerful enemy of mankind.

Let us then turn our attention,

1st. To the foe with whom Jesus contended for sinners.

In the Gospel he is called “ the devil, the tempter, and Satan.” The evangelist relates that immediately after his baptism, “ Jesus was driven by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of

the devil," and this tempter is immediately afterwards denominated Satan, for Jesus said "Get thee behind me, Satan." Who then is this crafty enemy, who endeavours, under the mask of friendship, to persuade Jesus to unseenly and perilous actions? Perhaps a Pharisee, or some other wicked and artful Jew, who had noticed the peculiar animation with which Jesus was zealous for the truth, but was apprehensive lest he might eventually discover that of which the people ought not to be informed; viz. their violent oppression under the pretended piety of the council and themselves. Perhaps he was sent out by the chief priests to bring him to the close of his career, or to inveigle him to do a sinful act, so that his dishonour might be spread abroad among the people, and that thereby an end might be put to his influence over their understandings. It is wonderful indeed, that these ideas have been countenanced by Christian expositors! Why at that time should the Sanhedrim be fearful of the courage of Jesus? They knew him not, and had heard nothing which could awaken their suspicions; for until his baptism he had lived unknown, far distant from Jerusalem, in a city which was despised, calm and at rest, in the dwelling of his reputed father, in whose labour he participated, and was ready, as an obedient son, to perform all the tasks which were imposed on him. Once only, in his twelfth

year, he had exhibited most astonishing proofs of penetration and understanding, when he interpreted the most abstruse prophecies, in the presence of the Jewish doctors in the temple : but in his whole discourse, not the slightest disapprobation of the predominant modes of thought of the great council was evinced : since that time there had been a lapse of eighteen years, and Jesus still lived in tranquillity without disclosing his divine mission. By baptism he steps forward the first time, as the Redeemer of the world, who had been promised by God ; but scarcely is he baptized, before the spirit drives him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. “Then,” says the evangelist, “he was driven by the spirit into the wilderness,” as soon as the voice from heaven, at the river Jordan, had declared him to be the Father’s only and beloved son. How then could the Jews be excited to hatred and bitterness against him at that time, as from his lips no word had yet been heard which could occasion their disquietude ; and that they had sent out a tempter to him, is also an unfounded and undemonstrable conjecture. But could he who tempted him be a mere man ? What ridiculous pride it would be in a Jewish citizen to long for adoration ; that most abominable request, which never could have entered into the mind of a Jew, as by the whole nation idolatrous worship was abhorred. What man could be so foolish as to offer the king-

doms and the glories of the world for an external mark of veneration, and to disgrace himself by a promise that evinced a want of sense and understanding; for who can dispose of that of which he is not the possessor, and which he is not able to procure? It is evident that the tempter of Jesus must be the evil Spirit, he whom the sacred writers generally denominate the devil or Satan, and the old serpent, whose head, according to the prophecy, was to be bruised by the Messiah, because he had seduced our first parents. To him alone is the name of devil or Satan peculiarly applicable; he is the most bitter enemy to man, and a daring opposer of the will of the Almighty: it is even he of whom Christ bears witness, that he is the father of lies, a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.—John, viii. 44. Who but the spirit that had apostatized from God, could presume to make such an assault upon the guiltless Jesus; and to whom could he be an object of suspicion at that time, except to the crafty betrayer, who with restlessness and anguish had long expected that the Deliverer of the human race, whom God had promised, would arrive, and bereave him of his sovereignty? And in the temptation we see at once the artful wickedness concealed beneath the cloak of piety, which has distinguished all the designs of Satan from the very beginning;—it indicates the wonted hatred and the cruel desire

to effect the perdition of the lovers of religion, which was previously evinced towards the primeval inhabitants of the world ; and it unmasks his haughtiness and ambition, which were the sins by which himself had fallen, and into which Adam had been drawn by his seductive artifices. To crave adoration ; to offer the kingdoms of the world and all their glories ; and to persuade others to an arrogant self-confidence, are such lively features of his own likeness, that we can easily discover that this was the evil Spirit. The raiser of sedition in the kingdom of the Creator, who would not acknowledge the supremacy of his legitimate Lord, but on the contrary, desired to be the master of the world himself, can neither think nor act in a different manner. It is probable that the festive nativity of Jesus, which was solemnized by bands of angels with triumphant songs of joy, had made him attentive. He knew not what would be achieved by this distinguished child ; yet he was apprehensive of the Messiah, and must immediately conjecture, from these preparations, that Jesus was He of whose advent he had long been fearful. From that moment he began to scrutinize most deeply all the events which were connected with the object of his suspicion ; he had not even been absent from his baptism, but had remarked the voice which had been heard from heaven, and that had inspired him with the agonizing doubt whether this Jesus

were not the Messiah. Now, under the impulse of the Spirit, the Redeemer wanders forth into the wilderness. The Holy Ghost, that recently had lighted on his head as he stood in the water, actuated him by an internal powerful incentive to go immediately after his baptism into the wilderness, between Jericho and Jerusalem; a frightfully desolate, mountainous, uncultivated and rocky spot, which was the refuge of wild beasts and of robbers.

This was the place in which God had decreed that Christ should exhibit the first proofs of his courage and constancy, and thither he was conducted by the influence of the Spirit, to suffer the temptations of the Devil. There, under the support of the operative omnipotence of his divine nature, he has lived forty days and forty nights without food or drink, has devoted his time to prayer and meditation, has thought over the momentous errand on which the Father had sent him into the world, and has prepared himself to complete it with alacrity. It can scarcely be doubted whether in the interval all his actions had not been observed by Satan, for of what could he be more desirous than of obtaining a perfect certainty of the person of Jesus, who he was, and for what purpose God had favoured him with extraordinary evidences of his especial affection? To make this experiment,

he follows him into the wilderness; but fear allows him not to venture any examination before the Saviour feels, and probably confesses, his hunger in audible petitions. The tempter thinks this the time to commence the attack, when his apparent faintness promised him a victory. Now he is emboldened for the enterprise, and advances with all the subtlety which could be devised, in order to deceive the heart of innocence. But how does he present himself to the eyes of Christ? Was it by images excited in the imagination, by the means of which he might think that he conversed with a person present, and heard a human voice; or in an external form, as a journeying Hebrew; or perhaps a messenger of light? The Evangelists mention nothing relative to these questions, and our own conjectures are scarcely adequate to their solution. However, it is certain that Satan did not work immediately on the understanding of our Lord, or infuse into him the thoughts and ideas which are contained in the conversation which is described by the sacred penmen, who relate the whole as a real occurrence, without leaving the least vestige, from which the contrary could be concluded. How could Satan have the power of instilling such impure desires and such disgraceful wishes into the holy soul of Jesus, for it is not possible for him to excite evil propensities in a heart which is not of itself corrupt; and if it were

allowable for him, through irresistible violence, to cause illicit sensations in the minds of the pious, how could sin be imputable to men themselves? He tempts those who fear God, by the help of their innate evil inclinations, and impels the ungodly to sinful actions, with the assistance of their inordinate desires, which have the ascendancy within their minds. In this manner, through the medium of covetousness, which had long been rooted in his heart, he wrought on Judas to betray his master: but Jesus was conceived by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, without any intermixture of human agency, and his soul was not contaminated by the natural depravity, which, by an ordinary birth, is transmitted from generation to generation. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."—1 Pet. ii. 22. Thus neither was the tempter capable of exciting unlawful emotions in his mind, there being nothing found within it, on which he had power to operate; and there was no sinful propensity, of which he could either cause the excitement or augmentation. In consequence of these grounds, with justice we may assert, that he assailed the Redeemer in a visible form and with an external discourse and audible expressions. But who can determine what was the shape which he assumed, whether it was that of a human being or of an angel? So much the more dangerous the tempter would have

been had he appeared before the Saviour's eyes, surrounded by the glorious brilliancy which decks the spirits of the realms of light. Then he would have seemed to be sent down from heaven, to minister to the assistance and support of the necessitous Jesus, and his proposal would have been considered as an injunction of the Deity. But our Lord would have fallen into the greater perplexity ; and with difficulty would he have escaped from the temptation, if wisdom and foresight, piety and prudence, had not conducted him through every step of the slippery paths of mortal existence.

Now then we know the enemy against whom Jesus entered the lists for sinners. Let us pause a little at this consideration, in order to muse on the severe destiny of our dear Redeemer at his entrance on his mediatorial office. Scarcely is he ready to begin his mighty work, before the greatest obstacles are raised by wickedness and falsehood, and he is exposed to the crafty persecutions of a cruel and a cunning spirit. Pure and innocent as he is, he cannot be free from temptation to sin. The seducer will wage war against his fidelity and do violence to his mental rectitude. The old infernal serpent thirsts for his precious blood, and for his holy soul prepares eternal ruin, and the Lord of the creation is to become the victim of the most unworthy of all creatures. O what a deep abasement is here ! And to this he has voluntarily

subjected himself for thee, O sinner! that thou mightest be rescued from the overbearing power of the Devil. There he stands, solitary and abandoned, where desolate nature had accumulated her most tremendous horrors. He stands exhausted with hunger, bereft of all human assistance, and under a heaven which was closed against him, and out of which no ray of hope will gleam, as if the Lord had consigned him to the most miserable death; and he is assaulted by a foe, who is not satisfied with the ruin of his body, but pants for the destruction of his soul. We have reason to contemplate this sight with pitying eyes. Our hearts must feel the most afflictive sorrow. He stands there in our stead, to pay the penalty of our offences, and to make satisfaction for our inconsideration. Are we then so deeply sunk in our secular delights, that our minds can no longer be capable of these friendly emotions of grief and melancholy, which would otherwise be excited by the necessity of a benefactor? And is not this the time when Jesus suffers, to wail the sins for which his generous soul must tolerate the most acute affliction? Or shall the world continually withhold our thoughts from this most serious one? This ought, however, to be reflected on more attentively by every one in his closet.

But I will proceed to the second consideration, which will inform us of the conflict itself; how it

was prosecuted and terminated triumphantly by the Saviour. Thrice Jesus was assailed, and thrice he gained a victory. The tempter falls on him with different weapons; but ever experiences the same resistance, and is finally under the necessity of retreating in confusion. "If thou be the Son of God," thus he accosts him the first time; "command that these stones be made bread."—Ver. 2. "If thou be the Messiah, the Son of the Supreme Being, of whom David sang in prophecy: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."—Psalm ii. 7;—"if thou be the beloved of the Lord, of whom the Jewish people are in anxious expectation, then also thou must have power to transform these stones into bread. Would not then the mightiness of thy Father to create be also communicated to thee? And would he have exposed thee in this place to perish with hunger? By this alone thou mayest be anticipately assured whether he recognises thee as his Son, and thine omnipotence will prove itself effectual, as soon as thou dost put it to the test." But with this flattering counsel there was an intermixture of secret poison. The tempter will not raise the Saviour, but depress him. He will infuse a distrust into the heart of Jesus, whether he had indeed the Father's love? And if the voice which published at his baptism, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," came down from God? How could so

high a dignity be consistent with his present sufferings? The question is put with double craftiness. If he would not entertain a doubt of this, then he must be drawn to presumption. At least it was the wish of Satan to be able to prevail on him to make an arrogant and boastful use of the miraculous powers of which he was possessed. Had our blessed Lord executed the proposal which was made him; had he metamorphosed the stones into bread, as he did water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee; how then the tempter would have jeered at his credulity, and have upbraided him with having had an unreasonable recourse to the wonderful gifts which had been imparted to him by the Deity! Of what utility would it be to work miracles for the Devil? He is neither actuated to conversion nor to faith. He rages with revenge against the most exalted Majesty, and is eternally incorrigible. But the most subtle wiles are overcome by the cautious sagacity of Jesus. His confidence in the protection of the Father is immovable, and his conviction of his being delegated by the Deity can be weakened no more by menaces than by enticements. He rejects the artful counsel of the enemy with this pious answer, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—Ver. 4. That is, by every thing which the Lord pleaseth to appoint for

nourishment. “I require not,” he would say, “to have my life protracted by means of bread, or to be kept from destruction by the common modes of human preservation. It is equally possible for Omnipotence to support my strength by other means. And if the numerous Israelitish host, that wandered for the space of forty years through desert and uncultivated regions, could be sustained, without either corn or fruits, by manna solely which the Lord rained down; who ought then to entertain any doubt of the all-effective operations of Providence? Wherefore should I avail myself of my powers, to anticipate the timely succour of my Father by a miracle? A work which ought not to be performed, except as an evidence before men of the divine origin of my doctrines.” Such is the language of the intrepid One whose confidence is grounded on true conviction, and thus a good conscience produces an undaunted courage in the most severe tribulations, and virtue communicates powers to resist the most dangerous attacks of the tempter! Here genuine resignation to that which is pleasing to the Deity, is represented in its true colours; here patience and hope are both effective in their full force, and here religion gains a victory, but wickedness and craft are put to shame. Yes! it is gratifying, even amid our sorrow for the undeserved treatment of the Saviour, to mark the valour with which

he fights our battles. The fierce persecutor who ceaselessly is prowling for our souls, to plunge them into ruin, can be vanquished. Who then would dread him, or be terrified at that power which he has now remaining? And although he frequently attack, yet he will be as frequently repelled when Jesus is our fellow-combatant.

This is proved in the other temptation with which Satan presumes again to assail the Saviour: "Then the Devil taketh him up into the holy city and setteth him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."—Ver. 5, 6. The holy city is Jerusalem, dignified from the times of old with such an honourable name by the prophets, because it contained the holy temple, in which the Majesty of heaven and earth visibly revealed his especial presence. But that which was commonly called the pinnacle of the temple, was an elevated side-building or wing, looking towards the south, at its base encompassed by a vale so deep, that it could not be contemplated from above, without terror. To this dangerous spot, our Lord wanders accompanied by the evil spirit. He mounts the walls, and looks into the vale. This had been desired by the Devil, and

for what purpose it is not difficult to conclude from the request. He was desirous of persuading Jesus to a daring leap, to make him a self-murderer. "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." "In the wilderness thou hast just exhibited the most praise-deserving proofs of thine immoveable confidence in the protection of Providence. But who could admire thy virtue and estimate thy worthiness according to its merits in that place? Thou wast destitute of considerate witnesses, and thine honour was robbed of its brilliancy through a want of encomiasts. Thou oughtest to manifest thy confidence here before the eyes of all the dwellers in Jerusalem, that they may celebrate the omnipotence of thy Father, and extend thy renown in merited commendations; and here thou shouldest act as a Messiah, in order to be acknowledged by the multitude, and to be received with suitable respect. In fact, to what danger couldest thou be obnoxious, being a Son of the Creator, the beloved of the Deity, and the favourite of heaven? Hath not God commanded his angels to take care of the faithful, and to guard them against perils?" So craftily does the evil spirit conceal his sanguinary intention! Jesus must have died, had he been willing to precipitate his body into the terrible abyss; or must be publicly insulted with acrimonious upbraidings "in the audience of the

people," who were present in the temple, to sacrifice or pray; if he would not accommodate himself to the will of the Devil. Then it would be evident, that he was not capable of any thing, except that which could be done by others; and then he would have manifested a distrust which would not correspond with his former intrepidity, and would be little consistent with a Messiah. What a triumph for the tempter, if Jesus had not again burst the snares asunder and again obtained the ascendancy! But the Saviour of Israel is as great in prudence and in penetration, as in authority and mightiness, in both respects unlimited. He answers the treacherous enticement of his adversary with this short remembrance: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—Ver. 7. That is, without a reason and necessity, thou oughtest not to require an evidence of his miraculous protection; and thou oughtest to walk in the ways which he hath pointed out, with confidence in his succouring defence, but not take an unnecessary step "which leadeth to destruction." It is wisdom combined with meekness which moderates the speech of the Redeemer. He borrows God's own testimony from the holy word, to deprive the tempter of every opportunity for evasion, and he shows that not a deficiency of trust in Providence, but allegiance to God

and veneration for his government, ought to restrain his feet from the paths of wickedness. The evil which had been meditated by the deceitful spirit could be easily discovered; but, notwithstanding, no reproach, no complaint, no asperity is heard to proceed from the lips of Jesus. At all times he is alike tranquil and unaltered: he is actuated by a meek spirit, which cheerfully endures the greatest wrongs, and thirsts not after vengeance. Yes! the victory which our blessed Lord obtained is glorious above measure; for it is distinguished by understanding, as well as by the most noble properties of the heart. He is assailed with greater audacity the third time, but he withstands it as hitherto, is conqueror again, and crowns his triumph by the final routing of his enemy. Again the Devil taketh him to one of the highest mountains of the country, the great hill not far from Jerusalem, in the frightful desert which has been previously described. There he points out to him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. On all sides, as far as the eye can reach, he shows him Italy, Syria, Persia and Egypt, and in the most magnificent manner he describes that which the powers of vision could neither penetrate nor contain. "All this will I give thee," says he, "if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The proud Spirit cannot restrain

his ambitious wishes: he manifests himself by that which is designed to entrap Jesus, and is recognised. By riches and by honours, which are the common snares for the human species, he hoped at last to weaken the constancy of our blessed Lord. According to the opinion of the Jews, Messiah was to rule over the earth, with glittering authority, surrounded by the pageantry of princes. Of him they were in anxious expectation, and wished soon to be able to hasten out to meet him to attend his festive triumph over captive kings. From this circumstance Satan now endeavoured to derive a new pretext for his third temptation. He would smooth the way for Jesus to obtain the sovereign rule over other nations without farther difficulty, and thereby enable him to shine before the world as the anticipated Messiah; and as a recompense, he wanted nought but simple adoration. Christ was only to hail him as his sovereign, and bend his knee before him as a vassal. Kingdoms would then become his own, and might be ruled according to his pleasure; as formerly the cruel Herod had governed Jewry, whilst Augustus had retained the sovereign power and highest rank. For a carnally-minded soul, of all the assaults, this would have been the fiercest. How few would have subdued their sensual lusts, and rather chosen poverty than riches, or infamy than mightiness and honour, that God's commandments might not be trans-

gressed ! But Jesus is holy, undefiled, and free from all inordinate desires : he knows no greater happiness than to love his Father and follow his injunctions ; and he dismisses the impious tempter with this merited rebuke, “ Get thee behind me, Satan ! for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” —Ver. 10. Satan had debased the majesty of the Most High ; he had done violence to the rights which appertain to no one but the true Deity ; had set himself up as the governor of the world ; and had required an unseemly adoration. Is it then wonderful that Christ declares how inwardly it grieved his noble soul to hear such insults ? His zeal intimidates the scoffer, who flees away confounded ; and to the honour of our conquering Saviour, in concert we can sing the glorious song of joy, “ O Death ! where is thy sting ? O Grave ! where is thy victory ? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The important reasons, which, in consequence of the valiant conflict of Jesus, ought to augment the most internal pleasure of our hearts, shall be briefly mentioned now,

Under the third head, in which I have to describe the design and utility of our Saviour’s struggle with the most inveterate enemy of mankind. The Evangelist describes the temptation of Jesus, as a determinate counsel of God, and an event

and continually guided by the light of thy word to a right knowledge of thine infinite merits. May their faith be led by a sincere love to thee and to thy Father; by an operative desire of genuine piety, and by a lively and immoveable hope amid the most perilous temptations. Thou knowest thy true worshippers, O Lord! and art not ignorant of their distress. Who can strengthen them in their infirmity, but thou, Almighty One! who hast subdued their most ferocious enemy, the primitive seducer? Be also present with them now, to be their ally against infidelity and mockery, against the subtlety of deceivers, and the violent assaults of the ungodly. If during a short time we must be harassed by various afflictions, still give us grace and power, that this trial of our faith may be found to our commendation, praise and honour, at thy future glorious appearance. Incessantly will we love thee with the most ardent affection, although our eyes cannot behold thee in thy divine glory at this time. To thee alone shall our whole heart intrust itself, until it shall please thee to crown our faith with an eternal beatification. Hear us, we entreat thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Relying on thine atoning righteousness, we beseech thee to hear our urgent prayers, O triune God! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON X.

MATTHEW, xi. 2—10.

*Now when John had heard in the prison the works of
Christ, he sent two of his disciples,
And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do
we look for another? &c.*

HOW must the sinners tremble, who deride the Son of the Most High, and depreciate his divine dignity! Listen to the meekest of men, when, with a voice of lamentation, he denounces the merited chastisement of sinners: “Woe unto the world because of offences.”—Matt. xviii. 7. On other occasions love issued from his lips, and his mouth overflowed with the most friendly language of exhortation to melancholy souls. But now vehement in spirit, he breaks out with a menacing woe, which announces punishment and desolation. He proclaims the most fearful vengeance over a

faithless and ungodly generation; that had roused the Deity to anger by their offences. But in what consists this sin so heinous, the abhorrence of which could infuse the most violent displeasure into the tender heart of Jesus? Is it an immediate offence against the Supreme Majesty of the Sovereign Lord? Or does the word give us to understand an injustice towards our neighbour; a stumbling block, a misleading, by which innocence is betrayed and plunged into calamity? According to the Scriptural use of the word, the expression may comprise both. To take offence, means most generally to occasion the fall of others, either by word or carriage, or by deeds and conduct. He who by boldness of manners or of morals inclines his neighbour to coolness or security, offends him, and the same is done by him who seduces others by his example, to do that which otherwise they had not done. In this sense Christ cautioned us not to offend one of the least of those who believe in him; and said that it is better for such an offender, "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."—Mark, ix. 42. But the same expression also signifies an audacious offence against the most holy person of our Lord himself; a stumbling block in the minds of men respecting his sufferings and death, which breaks out into contempt and mockery. To be offended at Jesus; that is, to be

ashamed of his name, to reject his propitiation; to deprive him of the honour which is his due, for the mercy which he has shown unto the human race, and to evince such a small degree of respect for him as to depreciate his divine mightiness, is what was meant by the disciples when they said, that the Pharisees who heard the words of Jesus were offended at him.—Matt. xv. 12. How lamentable it is, that their mode of thinking is revived and has diffused its ruinous effects over all Christendom! “False prophets arise and deceive many. Iniquity is abundant and love is cold. Many are offended: they betray one another; they hate one another, and, were it possible, even the elect also would be deceived.”—Matt. xxiv. 10, 11, 12. Who can stand in the general confusion which has been occasioned by the enemies of Jesus? Who can preserve his faith unadulterated and free from pernicious errors, until the end? Still, my devout brethren, it becomes us not either to renounce or mistrust it. We are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. We have learned to hold all that our blessed Saviour has commanded; and he will be with us daily unto the close of this terrestrial scene. Confident and full of this consoling hope, I venture this day, according to the opportunity afforded by the Gospel, to encourage your devotion to

A STEADINESS IN THE FAITH AMID THE SCANDALOUS JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD, RESPECTING THE CRUCIFIED JESUS.

I must describe to you,

1st. How he is become an offence to the world, and then consider,

2dly. By what means we shall best preserve our faith unadulterated and pure amidst this scandal.

The first consideration cannot be pleasing to rightly-disposed Christians, who love and honour their Redeemer with a sincere heart. They must hear ungrateful infidelity recompense her greatest benefactor with unworthy reproaches; and they must see rebellious sinners tread under-foot the Son of God, and vilify the holy blood which was, however, shed for their redemption. What grief to a nobly thinking soul, that understands and appreciates the unmerited benefits of Jesus towards transgressors, who were deserving of reprobation! And how distressing to a mind devoted to its God to perceive the faithless conduct of the impious towards their most sincere friend and unwearied merciful Saviour and Intercessor! Still these are the times in which he has foretold that the great multitude in persecuting him and his disciples would think to do God service. Even many among

those who live by the Gospel, pervert that most precious part of it relative to a divine Saviour; they are offended at him crucified. In order not to be drawn away by their delusive representations we ought to know what is the scandal at which they take offence. So little can such considerations tend to the encouragement of those who fear God, that they must rather excite sorrow and displeasure; yet it is necessary, at all events, when opportunities present themselves, to recall them to mind as a warning and admonition against the artifices of the deceiver. The Gospel for the day calls on me to insist on the following words of Jesus, which are doubly important to us in the present disposition of the world, viz. “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.” Let us then consider,

1st. How the crucified Redeemer is become an offence to the world.

It shows itself constantly in scepticism and infidelity, in hatred and in bitterness against the divine truths, and evinces, by actions from generation to generation, that which the Apostle Paul formerly lamented, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” As those enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees and Scribes, while he was a pilgrim upon earth, shut their eyes

against the clearest evidences of his divine power and dignity ; so now the fascinated multitude that are only governed by the senses and follow their carnal lusts, go on to raise doubts of his divinity, or wholly to deny him. Similar to those blinded Jews, who mocked him in his sufferings, without considering the counsel of the eternal Deity in which these ignominious tortures were appointed, as a redeeming offering for the sins of all men ; so now the careless slaves of concupiscence continue to jeer at the crucifixion of our Lord, and despise him in his death, without any dread of the righteous vengeance which God had denounced against the enemies of the cross, “ that they shall bring upon themselves a swift destruction.” Although the times are changed, still wickedness retains the same mode of cogitation ; and although the hatred and detestation of the Christian doctrines, which are entertained by the ungodly, be concealed under different disguises, their basis is continually the same. Men hide them under the semblance of friendship, and do a greater injury, because it is less noticed by those who are rightly disposed. Many seem to be zealous for the dignity of Jesus, and are notwithstanding secretly his persecutors ; by wrong expositions, they endeavour to weaken the power of his redemption and rob him of the supreme honour of being similar to the Father in essence and in works ; they devise innumerable artifices

to draw away the mind of the simple from the heavenly truths, to notions merely earthly and carnal, which fill up the confused fancy with lascivious images; and they bring forth calumniating complaints against those who love the Redeemer and preach his death, as well through hatred towards those disagreeable witnesses of the truth, as through craft and deceit, to infuse into the church a tormenting distrust, even of religion. That Christ, God's own Son, had resigned his life as a guilt-offering for all our transgressions, was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. This is an obstacle to our imaginary philosophers, that have thrown away the light of the Gospel to wander about in the former darkness, under the feeble guidance of their reason. The proud Pharisees would not acknowledge the inability of nature to attain the right properties of true virtue by her own strength, but relied on self-formed faculties to fulfil the law of God, and boasted of their own righteousness. Neither will high-minded infidelity allow her innate weakness, but ventures to defy the Lord with a self-elected integrity, and despises the most glorious means of grace, which he hath appointed for the improvement of the heart; thus is the world scandalized at a crucified Saviour; it takes offence at his doctrine and person; it cannot tolerate his works and institutions for the deliverance of the miserable,

and endures not the order and plan which he has prescribed for the acceptance of salvation.

But what is the cause? This also continues to be the same now as in the ages which are past away; false prejudices and sensual inclinations. The chief priests and all the Jewish people, drawn away by preconceived sentiments respecting the earthly kingdom of the Messiah, did not allow that Jesus was the true one, because they saw not the external magnificence, the splendour and power, in which they thought the promised Saviour would shine forth. His poverty was an obstacle for them, and his mean appearance gave them an opportunity to despise him. This utterly corrupted nation, that had long been plunged in vice and in unrighteousness, had lost both the knowledge and desire of that which is celestial: nothing could please them except the earthly, that glittered to the eye; and nothing could delight their vain hearts, save the hope of being raised in life to riches and to honour. Instead of flattering promises and pompous panegyrics, simply warnings and exhortations to a serious repentance were heard from the mouth of Jesus. In vain they expected the wished-for freedom from the Roman yoke; he was desirous of delivering their souls from the dominion of Satan, but not of procuring them an abundance of temporal felicity: and they rejected the former benefit,

because of much greater moment to them was the latter. What indeed does the carnally minded soul care for the inestimable glories of eternity, when only the body here, in time, can be gratified and refreshed with the joys of appetite? Just such a spirit animated the false prophets, of whom St. Peter testifies, “that in the last days, they shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord, which bought them; through covetousness,” says he, “shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; they walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they and self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities,” speak evil of things they do not understand; “they count it pleasure to riot in the day time, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls, and speak great swelling words which allure, and promise liberty to them who allow themselves to be enticed by them, whilst they themselves are the servants of corruption.”—2 Pet. ii. 1, 3, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19.

How similar is this description to the prevailing infidelity of the times! It seems as if the present state of the world had been pictured to the eye of the Apostle when he wrote. Here is manifested the true motive of the ungrateful acrimony of the enemies of Christ, and here their whole character is apparent in its proper form. The Spirit

of God has laid them bare in their ignominy; and it is testified by experience, that he hath. O grievous recollection, that our brethren, who are redeemed as well as ourselves, will be stigmatized with these tremendous marks, at the righteous tribunal of the Lord! But see, O Christian, an evident proof of the divinity of the Scriptures! So many centuries before, a disciple of the Saviour predicted what was to happen at this time, and it is exactly fulfilled! Then he, who knew the hearts of these men before they and their fathers to the thousandth degree of consanguinity were brought forth, must be omniscient. He must have given the Apostles their thoughts, and have lent them every stroke in their whole portraiture. Thus then the doctrine of Jesus is divine, for they by whom it was promulged were under the impulse of the Holy Ghost: "a Spirit that searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." — 1 Cor. ii. 10. Consider also, O afflicted soul! what are the comforts and the encouragements which are contained in ancient prophecy! Thus it ought to happen, for it was both foreseen and foretold by the Lord. From eternity he knew the tribulation of his church, and with the rejection of his Son he was acquainted, before he reared the lofty frame of nature. He permits the ungodly to make a progress in the broad road of sin, and holds back vengeance through compassion.

A time is fixed for the combination of omnipotence and righteousness, when the divine forbearance is ultimately wearied, in order to advance the interest of the pious with strength and victory. Wherefore should we distrust, or cast away a hope of a future improved condition of virtue and religion? "Upon this rock," says Christ, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Before the earth experiences destruction, and all the elements return to nothing, the kingdom of grace of the Redeemer will not be deprived of its existence. Constantly will it flourish, whatever be the state of individual portions of the inhabited world; and constantly he will continue to collect citizens for the heavenly Jerusalem from every nation and all languages. There are many in Europe, who now deride and dishonour him, but indeed there are more considerable numbers in another part of the world, by whom he is served and from whom he receives adoration; and who can enumerate his secret adherents, even there where "the abomination of desolation," has fixed her chief abode? Elijah was apprehensive that "he was the only true worshipper of God that remained in idolatrous Israel; but he was assured by the Lord, that there were seven thousand left him who had not bowed their knees unto Baal."—1 Kings, xix. 14, 18. How happy hitherto have

we been, among whom bold contemners have not openly presumed to raise their seducing cry ! By a heedless and incautious lukewarmness may we not render ourselves unworthy of the continuance of so great a mercy ! Both our own advantage and the salvation of posterity, enjoin us to make a seasonable defence of the saving knowledge which is implanted in our souls by the word, and to arm our hearts for a valiant perseverance in the faith, of which we once made a profession. With this intention, the gospel for the day leads us to inquire,

2dly. By what means we shall be best able to preserve our faith unadulterated and pure amid the scandal of the world ? For this purpose, let us first examine our grounds of faith, and prove the evidences on which our confidence in Christ depends ; and then, in the second place, let us balance carefully the dangers which are the concomitants of infidelity against the consequences of a lively faith. Both parts were commanded by our Lord in his conversation with the disciples of the Baptist. They also were on the point of being drawn away by the general prejudice against his person ; and their Master appeared to them to be better adapted to represent the expected Messiah than He. They were offended at his mean appearance among the Jewish people, and were also inflamed with bitter envy, because by his ministry he seemed to be doing an injury to the Baptist. John was desirous

of divesting his disciples of those dangerous doubts, which could easily degenerate into infidelity and disrespect, and sends them unto Jesus himself, in order to facilitate their attainment to the most certain conviction. To their sceptical inquiry, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" the Saviour gives an answer replete with meekness, elucidation, and direction;—that they should meditate on his works with their thoughts turned towards the language of the prophets; and compare his conduct with those characters which were ascribed to him in the Old Testament, in order to judge whether in his person the Messiah, who had been promised by God, was come into the world or not: "Go," saith he, "and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." — Ver. 4, 5. Here Jesus opens the surest avenue to a rational and well-grounded knowledge of the truth. We ought to prove his works and search his consolatory doctrine: we ought to derive our information respecting him from this only unfallacious source; and we ought to decide with deliberation according to the true tokens, without making human authority our basis.

Who that contemplates the works of our Lord

with the accuracy which is required by a sincere love of truth, can avoid being filled with admiration and with holy awe? With a mere word he clears the blinded eye, and gives the power of standing to those limbs which ever had been useless until then. By simply speaking to the lepers, they are cleansed; and he restores existence to the dead. He lavishes no human skill in the cure of those who were diseased; and he borrows no assistance to mitigate the sufferings of the needy. As man was formed at first by the mere will of the Creator, without foreign aid; in the same manner Jesus procures debilitated man his vigour and vivacity, without requiring the succour of another. His will alone was sufficient to effectuate more than could be done by the most skilful in the art of healing by science and by application. He rules as sovereign over life and death: equal to the Father in power to knit or to dissolve the natural union between the soul and body. Who sees not here the most apparent proofs of wisdom and omnipotence? What more could we require for a firm conviction of the divine authority and worthiness of the Saviour? Has not David certified that "God only doeth great wonders?"—Psalm cxxxvi. 4. And who could do them, except the Supreme Being, who knows no bounds, either in mightiness or penetration? Has Christ executed the same works a could be done by no one but the Father? has he

evinced his all-effective power in such proofs as demand infinite strength and understanding? Who could doubt then if the essence and properties of the Father belong to him? And the most impartial truth is plainly testified by the apostle St. John, when he says of him: "This is the true God and eternal life."—1 Epist. v. 20. His precious doctrine furnishes us with a similar assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, through faith in his blood. He preached the Gospel to the poor; he encouraged the sorrowing hearts which felt their inherent corruption with the most torturing melancholy: he strengthened them for new hope and consolation with this glorious promise: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—Matthew xi. 28. And, in lieu of sinners, he entered on the dreadful road, where intolerable sufferings and torments awaited him, through voluntary pity, with fraternal love and affection, in order to rescue the race of sinful Adam from the slavish prison of darkness and from misery. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."—Matt. xx. 28. Certainly, then, such a desirable compensation for all our transgressions is really accomplished. Our confidence in the propitiation of Jesus is too firmly grounded to be overthrown by the scandalous judgments and reproaches of the world: and for

those only who cherish doubt, either through carnal desires or determination, can hope seem dubious or to be distrusted. Is it not built on the all-holy testimony of our Lord himself? But who ought to subvert his authority, as it is publicly confirmed by signs and wondrous operations? Did not the Deity himself ratify the validity of the atonement, by raising the Redeemer from the dead? He died for our sins and rose again to glorify and confirm his propitiation. Only reflect, my fellow-redeemed Christians, on the manifold evidences of the Saviour's errand in the world, which occur to us every where in the sacred Scriptures, with a liberal soul and with an open heart. Examine them with consideration, according to their connexion and the natural sense of their order, without prejudiced opinions. Think with pleasure and attention upon the great works which Christ performed, to confirm his divine mission, to deliver sinners from their merited punishment. The fascinating flatteries of the flesh ought not to divert our thoughts from religious meditations, or diminish our desire for the exercises of devotion; neither ought the secret disgust, or degeneracy of the heart, to have the ascendancy over the voice of conscience, by which we are incessantly admonished. The longer we are habituated to a reverential intercourse with God in prayers and songs of praise, the more frequently we recollect the

Saviour in his painful sufferings, with feelings of our own unworthiness of so exalted a benefit: the more firmly rooted is our conviction, and daily the truth shines more clearly in our eyes. Then the anguish and disquietude which had been previously excited by the bantering assault of infidelity, are put to flight. Then the inveigling craftiness of the ungodly is deprived of all its power, and virtue is preserved uninjured. In vain will voluptuousness avail itself of all its artifices to delude us, and in vain will the tempter abuse his sagacity, to precipitate us into ruin, for then we are furnished with the weapons peculiar to the Spirit, in order to withstand our enemies, and to damp their violence. The Lord hath strengthened us in our weakness: he hath clad us in his whole armour, and hath made us mighty to resist the artful onset of the wicked One. — Ephes. vi. 11.

But in the Gospel for the day, Christ also alleges a powerful motive for the unchanging steadiness of his genuine servants: that is, the danger which is consequent upon infidelity, compared with the salvation which is the follower of a lively faith. He declares that those who are not offended in him, are the only blessed. How then can there be happiness in such as outrage him with an offence against his mighty person? If none but he can screen them from the

condign punishment of their transgressions, and if they still reject his proffered means of grace; who then can save them from the extreme of woe? Infidelity recompenses her worshippers merely with anguish and desponding horror at the approach of death. Immoderate sensuality weakens the body, vitiates the soul, and presses down the mind into a heedless stupefaction. Avarice consumes life, and pride renders it odious. The world is its own destroyer by its evil inclinations, as the ungodly one bears his punishment in his bosom, occasioned by his own iniquities; — a racking conscience; a corroded and tormented heart, rent asunder by internal secret reproaches. At last, however, the soul is satiated with carnal pleasures, but then experiences no greater joy; and under the most painful feelings of sorrow and affliction, it sinks into the most melancholy inaction. Only allow the mass of mankind to triumph in their irreligion as in a state of freedom, when every band is burst and all restraint has ceased; they are not sensible of their slavish yoke as long as their appetites can be gratified by a succession of many species of delights; but how soon this unbridled merriment is changed to trouble and to bitterness! How speedily sensual bliss exhausts its skill to satisfy the vanities of the mind! Amid tumultuous giddiness, an infidel spirit is devoid of the internal pleasure, without which no man can

be really happy. Smiles play around the mouth, and the heart is filled with trepidation. The tongue pours forth the language of mockery, and conscience passes sentence on the offender. Men defy death with boastful contumely, and still are terror-struck at the least sign which excites any supposition of its presence. They jeer at judgment and eternity, but endeavour also to escape from every thought and idea of them, as long as there is any possibility, and frequently they show by their behaviour that all their bravery is mere pretence. But above—where the Sovereign Judge summons to an account, without regarding the external aspect; there, where the most hidden thoughts will be brought to light, and justice will be done to every one, without either partiality or indulgence; there, where the abyss has spread its dreadful jaws, to swallow up the sons of condemnation—who can endure these terrible discussions? and there the infidel will be punished incessantly, according to his deserts. Our Lord himself, the most compassionate of judges, was under the necessity of passing a fearful sentence on such a one, that he might not act in contradiction to righteousness: “He that believeth on him is not condemned,” saith he; “but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. The wrath of God abideth on

him."—John iii. 18, 36. Often, my devout brethren, we will call to mind the dreadful danger which is attendant on infidelity, both in the temporal and the eternal state! It admonishes us to be prudent and circumspect in our conversation with the world; that by bad examples, piety may not be transformed into indifference or contempt; and it deters and draws back the mind from the flattering persuasions of sensuality. The more we know of the unhappy condition of contemners, the less will their jeering accusations disturb our faith or weaken our conviction. Nothing would contribute to our advantage, if we gained the world, but did an injury unto our souls.

But to withdraw his faithful from a participation in the scandal of the world, their heavenly Lord brings farther to their minds the great salvation which is attendant on a lively faith. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." — Ver. 6. Happy is the man who receives and confesses my doctrine without taking offence at it; and who loves and honours me with the most sincere veneration, without being hindered by my present external poverty! But what is the happiness which he promises them? Does it deserve also to be set in comparison with those terrestrial glories, which ought to be renounced for Jesus' sake? He who fears God will be best able to judge, by his own experience, whether the love of the

world, or the faith of the Redeemer, can be the promoter of his genuine welfare. When the former has delighted the senses for a moment, it leaves after it the most painful wounds in the afflicted conscience. On the contrary, when the latter begins from sorrow, in consequence of sin, it advances to hope for its remission; is augmented to courage, and becomes a joy so pure, that it is mingled with no gnawing disquietude; so great, that it sweetens the bitterest adversity; and so steadfast and immoveable, that death itself cannot diminish it. Have we meditated on the Saviour, as absent and concealed from our sensual eyes, with an inferior sort of joy here, then hereafter we shall see him face to face, encompassed with divine magnificence and majesty, and full of an ineffable delight, which continues without cessation during an unlimited eternity. What a salvation! Should we then hate ourselves more than we are hated by our sternest foes, and not desire to share this blessed hope? Should we exchange this real felicity for earthly opulence, which thieves can steal away and moths corrupt? for worldly greatness, which produces envy, and which allures malicious men to hurt us? or for carnal pleasure, which debilitates, dishonours and destroys both soul and body? What jewel can counterbalance a good conscience and a heart delighted with its God?—A possession common to the wealthy

and the indigent, and to all those who unfeignedly confess the name of Christ, and follow his exhortations. How good it is to be true unto the Lord, for he remunerates our faithfulness with rich blessings! How joyful to be assured of his especial favour, as a son is of the affection of his father; for, according to the manner of the world, he deceives not with false promises; but abides by his covenant, and gives abundantly! Let nought intimidate thee, fellow Christian, for that which thou mayest suffer under the scandalous judgments of the world respecting Jesus who was crucified! Be faithful unto death; adhere to the word; pay attention to thy ways; follow thy Saviour, and he will give thee a crown of life. —Rev. ii. 10. Amen.

FOR THE FOURTH

SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

WHY GOD IS INDUCED TO DELAY THE ASSISTANCE OF WHICH MEN OCCASIONALLY APPEAR TO BE MOST IN WANT.

THE PRAYER.

THOU doest all things well, all-wise, gracious and merciful God! thou ledest us onward amid sorrow and joyfulness, sufferings and felicity, want and abundance; according to the wise plan which thou hast formed in thine eternal counsel, for the advancement of thine honour and the real welfare of thy reasonable creatures. Even then, when thou appearest to treat us with severity, our salvation is thy chief object. In thy whole administration there is nothing which we could reprehend with justice, or which could be ordered more advantageously. It is all one unfathomable depth of riches in goodness, compassion, wisdom and in mercy. And in all thy ways thou art worthy of admiration; a Father, a commiserating God that deserveth our most inward thanksgivings. Teach us to perceive and feel

this weighty truth with a lively conviction, that our faith may not stagger and our hope sustain an injury. Let thy Spirit, by the power of the word, make it effectual on our hearts at this time, that our mouths may be filled with the sincere language of gratitude for thine infinite evidences of mercy ! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON XI.

MATTHEW, viii. 23 — 27.

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, in so much that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep, &c.

WHAT can parallel the consolatory hope which is imparted to the upright and genuine worshippers of the Deity, in every passage of the Holy Scriptures? They shall be rescued from the perils which could not be eluded by either human prudence or by human power; they shall not be destitute of any of the good things which are found serviceable to them by the wisdom of the Lord, and they shall not profitlessly have cast all their care on his paternal mercy. He will make all their events terminate to his own honour and to their real prosperity. “Call upon me in the time of trouble; so will I hear thee,” saith he.—

Psalm l. 15. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in him; and he shall bring it to pass."—Psalm xxxvii. 5. And in the same book of the sacred Scriptures we also find these words, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek thee."—Psalm ix. 10. How many glorious promises of a similar nature has God published in his word, by the prophets and apostles, for the consolation and relief of those who are afflicted! Who ought to entertain a doubt of their accomplishment? They are given by a Deity who loves truth and abominates lies; who tolerates not that which is false, and destroys all those who speak proud words with flattering lips. In spite of this, it is not of unfrequent occurrence that the Lord appears to be forgetful of his promises. Both the pious and the ungodly fall often into distresses of doubtful termination. They cry unto the God of mercy, but he hears them not; they complain of their calamities, but he gives them no comfort; and they appear to be on the point of sinking into the most horrible abyss, and yet no succour is in readiness. The disciples in the Gospel are in momentary danger of being hurried to the bottom of the sea; but their divine Master slumbers, as if he were unsolicitous respecting them, and cared not about their ruin. What is the cause of these unanticipated events by which hope is disturbed,

and the divine promises appear to be enfeebled? Can they also be in congruity with the Lord's gracious assurances of the most indubitable protection? And wherefore does the wise Governor act so little consistently with his most holy covenant? To obviate this language of distrust, which might easily perplex the understanding, and rob it of its peace, we will inquire,

WHY GOD IS INDUCED TO DELAY THE ASSISTANCE OF WHICH MEN APPEAR TO BE OCCASIONALLY IN WANT?

We must search the right causes ;

1st. On the side of God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness ;

2dly. On the side of men, in their own unseasonable and discontented conduct.

The succour of which men seem to be most in want, is postponed occasionally : 1st. Through motives on the side of God ; that is, he is actuated to retard the deliverance of those who suffer need, by his infinite wisdom and goodness. A boisterous storm has overtaken the disciples of our blessed Lord. The sea of Galilee, which they were crossing, is in commotion even from the bottom, and " the ship is covered with the waves ;" but Jesus sleeps, as if he heeded

not their misery. They awake him at the instant that the vessel is sinking, and death stands before them. But yet he reproves them for their fearful behaviour, before he will avail himself of his divine power to save them from their destruction. How astonishing it is that this affectionate Instructor, whose Almighty hand could cause the motion of the universe, will abandon his most faithful friends to the fury of the waters! But in the extreme of peril, to rebuke them for their terror, and to defer his assistance until it must soon appear too late to bring it into action:—how little can this conduct harmonize with the soft disposition of his heart! A ruthlessness which could be the least expected from a compassionate man, who on frequent former occasions had snatched the afflicted from their grievous state, although he had not been solicited. Still we ought not to be precipitate in our decisions on the operations of the Deity:—“All his paths are mercy and truth.”—Psalm xxv. 9. His footsteps are marked with wisdom, and all that he performs bears witness of the deepest understanding. With the wisest design, Jesus allowed his disciples to be immersed in danger, and, through goodness, he only determined to withhold his protection from them for a season. He was desirous of procuring them an opportunity to recognise his divine properties with a sensible conviction, and they were to be placed in calamitous circumstances themselves,

in order to experience, in their own case, with what extraordinary power he could become the deliverer of the needy. As the future teachers of the Gospel, it was peculiarly important for them to have the greatest possible certainty of the divine worthiness of Jesus. The authenticity of the doctrines of which they were to be the propagators, was built on this foundation ; and their own courage to testify to the world the Godhead of their master, even under the most barbarous persecutions, was demanding of the most powerful support. There should not be left them the smallest occasion to doubt, that their faith might not be weakened and lose its strength in adventitious temptations. But what better expedient could there be for the prevention of all probable distrust of the God-like mightiness of the Saviour, than this perilous situation, in which Providence must operate in the most miraculous manner for their preservation? Already is the vessel covered with the waves. The storm was a hurricane : a situation in which our blessed Lord, as merely man, irresolute and destitute of succour, was rendered subject to the self-same danger, but as God also he could screen them all. When they exclaimed, “ We perish ;” without skill, by the word of his power he converted the most fearful expectations to a delightful issue : — he shut the yawning jaws of instant death, and recalled the hope of life. — “ He arose, rebuked the waves and

the sea, and there was a great calm."--Ver. 26. A miracle so mighty, that it surpasses all the powers of nature: for never were the troubled waters soothed, at the same moment that the wind has ceased, but the commotion is of long continuance, and is slowly stilled. Here the disciples perceived that their Master was superior to humanity.—Who is this? They interrogate each other with astonishment and fear: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"—Ver. 27. The occurrence made the strongest impression on their souls. They had previously beheld his stupendous operations, and had admired them, but without being perfectly sensible of the divine power by which they were distinguished. Their heedless habits of thought allowed them not to carry their conjectures farther than their eyes could reach; and they soon forgot, even on the following day, that which had happened on the one preceding. The assistance was not experienced by themselves, but by others; persons in whose welfare they were not interested, and with whose necessity they were not acquainted. Neither did they understand how to appreciate them according to their value. Sceptics had seduced them to injurious suspicions, with facility; and at least by such objections as it was difficult for them to remove, they had enfeebled the impression which was made on their minds by subsequent miracles. Now, on the

contrary, what dubitation could be sufficiently powerful to disturb their faith, or banish the respect which they had entertained for the person of Jesus, as their hearts confirm that which had been perceived with their eyes;—now as internal feeling corroborates the testimony of their senses; and as they have learned by their own experience to be grateful for his Almighty power to give relief? Although Peter, through an unseasonable terror of the Jewish council, could swerve to perjury, and in the course of a few hours, avert an ideal danger of death by a renunciation of his Lord; still his conscience bore witness against him, and finally compelled him to confess the truth. How could he eradicate the inward conviction of these truths which were planted in his soul, that Christ was the true prophet, the promised Messiah, the Son of God himself, and the divine Lord and Governor of all nature? Experience had inculcated and confirmed them. Therefore he acknowledged the Redeemer in his apostolical office, with an incomparable intrepidity; and sealed his confession with the most excruciating martyrdom. And therefore John could solemnly declare, “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.”—1 Epist. i. 1, 3. Was not then our Lord’s determination to subject his dis-

ciples to the utmost danger, manifest wisdom and goodness? Their necessity was to glorify his mightiness; and the latter also was to be exhibited to their eyes for the immoveable confirmation of their faith.

A consolatory doctrine for thinking Christians, who are habituated to scrutinize the works of Jesus with suitable attention! They are all surrounded by abundant opportunities for useful thoughts and useful meditations. Those operations do not merely display the most evident proofs of the divine origin of religion, and represent the glorious attributes of our Mediator, his supreme dominion and majesty, his almightiness, providence, promptitude to succour, and other perfections of a similar nature, in their full effectuality: no! hence we learn also to have a better insight into the wise plan, according to which he orders all our events,—and they prove that we are governed by a compassionate Lord, who in the most doubtful circumstances has still proposed to himself our real welfare as the chief object of his administration. He it is who operates with the Father and the Spirit in the common providence for the preservation of the world. He took his seat at the right hand of the Father, after the guilt of sin was expiated, to rule there as God and man, in conjunction with Him, over every creature: but it is he likewise who, in an especial manner, exercises the supreme authority over the Church

that he has ransomed. In all that occurs to us, whether it be corporeal or spiritual, he is effectually and powerfully present. Even when the soul is disquieted by agonizing sorrow in consequence of the merited punishment of sin, and vainly sighs for comfort — a torture far greater than the most grievous sufferings of the body ; — even then, when the Church is assaulted by the enemies of the truth, and the darkness of delusion appears to overshadow the radiance of the Gospel ; — even then, when war rages, when pestilence depopulates a country, and famine rends her vitals, — and even when a storm lays low all our earthly hopes, — who could appoint us all these calamities, but he who alone taketh counsel for all things, and without whose permission not even the Tempter, the old Serpent, would dare to shed his poisonous influence on us ? But on that account does he discontinue to be the same affectionate Redeemer, who loved us so tenderly that he immolated his precious life as a propitiation for our sins ? Is it indifference or hatred that induces him to delay the aid of which we are sometimes most in want ? On the contrary, it is wisdom and goodness, and the judicious and benignant forethought of a paternal governor. Let us prosecute this idea in individual exigencies, for the edification of our understandings and our hearts. What is more afflictive, than during prayer and supplication to the compassionate God for the remission of our

sins, to be tortured notwithstanding by racking doubts, which extinguish the power of the gracious promises of the Gospel? What anguish to have a continual hope of the alleviation of conscience, and to be constantly experiencing the most violent inquietude! and ever to heave the sigh, and shed the bitter tear, with the most inward desire for consolation to invigorate the heart, and yet for sighs and tears to be in vain! Was not Asaph long under the necessity of giving vent to the most sorrowful complaints, before his prayers were granted by the Almighty? “In the time of my trouble,” said he, “I sought the Lord; my sore ran, and ceased not in the night-season: my soul refused comfort. When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God: when my heart is vexed, I will complain. Will the Lord absent himself for ever: and will he be no more entreated? Is his mercy clean gone for ever: and his promise come utterly to an end for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious: and will he shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?” —Psalm lxxvii. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9. With these pangs the careless lovers of the world are unacquainted; but among the really religious, there are not a few by whom their bitterness has been experienced. Grace shows its influence more powerfully upon some than upon others; and in some the hope of conversion is most prevailing, and in others, despondency. One who is weak in faith, long

advances timid and trembling before the throne of mercy, without being re-animated by a consolation sufficiently strengthening ; but another hastens onward with firmer steps, and tastes the heavenly gifts without a tedious expectation. Scarcely had St. Paul bewailed his former hatred of the Christian doctrines, during the space of three days, ere he received divine comfort, and was armed for a peculiar intrepidity. There a sincere Christian expired with a lively foretaste of the happiness of heaven ; but yonder, another resigns his exhausted spirit amid the prayers of lamentation, and after floods of tears. What a difference in the behaviour of Jesus towards these his worshippers ! Should we question his readiness to mitigate the anguish of the sorrowful ? And could the most compassionate of men be partial in his dealings with them ? Oh ! it is wisdom and mercy united for their advantage. He saw that they required humiliation, that they might not be drawn away to a proud contempt of their meaner brethren, or buried in the slumbers of security, and fall again into their former irregularities. He saw how greatly they required palpable admonitions of their want of the merits and supplications of a Redeemer. By their example, he would instruct and warn others ; and he would prepare them to receive the gladness of faith with the greater gratitude. After a sorrow of a short duration, a pleasure will succeed which will abundantly

repay the hardships which have been undergone, with a twofold revival of the mind. Did not the previous anguish of the rescued disciples render their happiness doubly valuable? And in the same manner, he who has long prayed for mercy fruitlessly, will obtain an exuberant addition of joy and happiness, most commonly while in this mortal life, and indubitably after death. The present condition of the Christian Church exhibits the most distressful image of carelessness, infidelity, deluding errors, and vile hypocrisy. It is a vessel in the roughest ocean, and on the point of being overwhelmed by raging and wild billows. It fluctuates between superstition and a denial of God, and between doubts of the most momentous truths, reproaches even against the sanctuary, and internal persecution. The builder sleeps or remains motionless, and scarcely does the danger seem to produce any effect on him : his servants are amazed and rendered dumb : his word is dishonoured, and they who “ make a mock ” of his divinity, or confound his atonement, think that they do the Deity a service. Where is the assistance which should raise the courage of the candid, and repel the despotic assault of ignorance? Where is the hope which should console true believers, and strengthen their confidence in this precious promise ; “ Upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it ? ” — Matthew, xvi. 18.

Hath the Lord then determined in his anger to come speedily upon us to remove our candlestick from our habitations? We must certainly acknowledge that the punishment would be equitable and deserved. Few among us remember from whence we are fallen, and how many are they who repent and do the first works?—Rev. ii. 5. Still it is better here also to discover the wisdom and the goodness of the eternal and compassionate One. Often hath he shown, in similar events, with what facility he is able to derive good consequences from the evil actions of men, and to convert fraudulent counsels to the advantage of those who were to have been destroyed. Perhaps he designs now to open the road to heterodoxy, that hypocrites and mercenaries may be discriminated from the upright; and that the torpor of the multitude may be exchanged for zeal and industry; to arrest ignorance,—to excite a general desire of instruction,—to cleanse the sacred truths from optional adjuncts, by the efforts of those who are bound to be their guardians, — and to set forth genuine Christianity in a more glorious lustre. Or perhaps this is the time which was predicted by St. Paul, in these words, “ Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in

unrighteousness.”—2 Thessalonians, ii. 10, 11, 12. It is sufficient for us that a deliverance is not retarded except by causes which can harmonize with wisdom and with goodness; and we will entertain the soothing hope, that they are intended to contribute to the general prosperity and advancement of the Church.

The same tenderness distinguishes the ways of Providence in our corporeal tribulations, and the same wisdom regulates the decrees of the Almighty, relative to our temporal happiness. The poor man toils under an oppressive servitude, and still he scarcely earns the coarsest food for the support of life. Yet let him not bewail his cheerless fate, but be content and full of gratitude! It was foreseen by the Creator before the world was called into existence, that riches would not tend to make him blest, and that leisure would precipitate him into the most enormous crimes. Of all the possible situations among the inhabitants of the world, that one is assigned him from which he could derive the greatest utility, in relation to the whole. To be prepared for the ineffable delights of the eternal state, without any interruption arising from outward vanities, he is destitute of the smallest surplus for more than the necessities of life. Is not the Lord then both reasonable and good, to deprive him of that which is terrestrial, that he may have no opportunity to strip himself of what

belongs to heaven? A malady consumes the stoutest hero, who was before the terror of his foes. Perhaps the Lord intends it to abase him, or to restrain him from erroneous steps. Hatred and persecution are exasperated to make an attack upon the innocent. This is permitted by the Supreme Being to admonish them to be circumspect and prudent in their conduct. Again : the man of piety and diligence is snatched away amid his blooming years by a disastrous death; the world loses the advantage which he could procure it; friends and families are bereft of their protector; his children are houseless and his widow destitute of bread; but God would keep him safe from flagrant sins, and preserve his soul from those seducements which were prepared for him, either by the evil Spirit or by the sons of carelessness; and with the most sedulous vigilance he will provide for the necessities of the survivors. How evident it is by all these recollections that the causes on the side of God, through which he is actuated to delay the succour of which men appear to be most immediately in want, ought merely to be sought in his infinite wisdom and benignity!

2dly. But he is often necessitated to withhold his support, in consequence of reasons on the side of men; that is, through their own undue and discontented conduct. This also can be illustrated

by the behaviour of the disciples in the Gospel. Their recourse to Jesus was not the effect of confidence, but anguish; their exclamation for his assistance, was not a hearty prayer, but an impatient and reproachful cry; and they required his succour, more as a right than as a boon of mercy, without humility and with vehement expressions. "Lord save us," said they, "we perish." What distrust blended with displeasure! Nothing but the danger in which they were involved can extenuate their guilt. They had outraged all veneration for the person of the Redeemer, and were ready to cast away their feeble faith which had been previously occasioned by his doctrines and his wondrous operations. Could he not justly reprove them in these words, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" "Doth it become you to be so violently alarmed in the presence of me, on whose protection you have sufficient grounds to fix your hopes? And have I deserved your confidence and high respect so little, that without any reserve you assail me with vilifying accusations?" It was just that they should hear their misdemeanor and should learn to know it, before he would accomplish their desires. Therefore, at first he chides and afterwards delivers them. Alas! there are numbers who daily raise greater obstacles to the succouring promptitude of God and Jesus, than the disciples! The irreligious

man pours forth no prayer, except when tribulation falls upon him; but his entreaty is the confused and deceitful cry of a foe who has been vanquished. He would rather wish, far removed from the regards of the Lord, and without apprehension of his punishment, to be enabled to enjoy his pleasures, or practise his iniquities. During the continuance of the storm, he sorrowing seeks the pardon of his sins, that death may not drag him away suddenly amid his impenitence! Does he desire with perfect earnestness to be loosed from transgressions? Are they truly his abhorrence; and, on the contrary, is piety with faith in the Redeemer, his most fervent longing? Oh! the dreadful tempest has only to subside a little, and the sun begin to appear in his brightness; a companion of congenial disposition has but to give the signal for merriment, and he has already forgotten both the Divinity and his offences. He is again gratified by his wonted recreations, and is again upon the road of sin, devoid of sorrow and alarm, but replete with shame for the terror by which he recently had been disturbed;—his terror of the universal Judge! How the sinner trembles under the acute pangs of a fatal malady! How heartily he is desirous of a blissful departure hence, if his terrestrial life has reached its end! And what does he not promise for conversion and reformation, if God will raise him from his

dying bed, and give him vigour to effect a cure? His prayer is granted; and now there ought to be a fulfilment of his engagement, I mean, the holy purpose to amend his life. But see, whether all the careless habits, which were to be relinquished, do not once more retain the ascendancy: if virtue do not vanish from his view; if faith be not contemned, and God repaid with a neglectful apathy of mind! Thus all the pious and the holy things of which he made professions in his sickness, were not the genuine feelings of his heart: thus he simply prayed with his lips that God would clothe him with the purity of the angels, but still he kept the wish within his breast, that he might prosecute his sinful courses; and thus he sought deliverance from his misery, rather from the physician than from God, whose communion in prayer and piety was his aversion. Is it then surprising, that the All-knowing Deity must often shut his ears against the mournful lamentations of these hypocrites, and suffer them to pine amid their sorrows? He sees the inmost throbbings of their carnal hearts, and abhors them, because they are disgraceful to his name. Unfeigned repentance requires an entire change of disposition and modes of thought. If they be sincere in their contrition, the ungodly cannot continue to cherish their corrupt propensities. No! they ought to be subdued, and ex-

changed for a purer desire for real piety. Without a lively affection for God and for the Saviour, which manifests its power in a holy course of life, faith has no existence; but without it there is no salvation resulting from the redemption of Jesus: "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."—John, iii. 16, 36. Of what avail is it then to implore the favour of a merciful Deity with the sighs of anguish, while the heart is continually under the spell of an ardent longing after earthly vanities? Could, indeed, the Lord take pleasure in the prayers of those who solely require his assistance, that they may not be destitute of all ability and power for the service of sin? Because equity allows him not to promote their criminal designs, the necessary succour is delayed; or it is withheld from them as a well-deserved punishment for their preceding transgressions. With a view to this he declared to Israel: "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood."—Isaiah, i. 15.

But the distrusting and groundless hope with which sinners frequently approach the throne of grace, is equally a reason why their misery is protracted. Men pray through custom, but without

confidence and consolation in the decrees of the Deity. Where that which is possible cannot be surveyed, and where the coherence in the events which have occurred, is hidden and unknown, there hope is excluded, and comfort degenerates into corroding desperation. Men propose their own plans, as a rule for Providence, and require that they should be followed. On the least deviation from them, distrust is again excited, and the mind relapses into an agonizing disquietude. Prayers are mingled with impatient complaints, wishes digress into numberless possibilities which are all rejected. We fear and we expect, alike uncertain, whether the Lord will send down a judgment to avenge a dereliction of duty, or a favour or blessing, as an evidence of his infinite goodness. But of these waverings what is the utility? And what does distrust produce in the Almighty, but displeasure? He who will ask for aught is instructed by the Apostle James to do so, "in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed."—Epist. i. 7. So many have prayed even to the last and received nothing, because they clamoured with vehement impatience. Their mind was inflamed with secret indignation at the misfortunes which befell them, and they had flattered themselves with greater proofs of the protection of Providence, because they thought that they deserved them;

but now, when invaded by adversity and overtaken by sufferings, they step forward, as those who have experienced cruel treatment. They weep and vent the words of lamentation, without receiving aught to give them comfort. They represent their burden as doubly galling, and are anxious to demonstrate the injustice which is done to them, in comparison of others. All these inordinate feelings alternate with their prayers, and often are conjoined with their devotions. What should the Lord do, but occasionally withhold the assistance which they required? They ought to discover, that all his donations are the effects of an unmerited bounty and compassion, and their behaviour towards him ought to be so regulated as to evince the most profound veneration and the firmest trust. To exercise their patience and by that means to prepare them for a greater tranquillity of mind, he conceals his kindness and seems as if he had not heard their supplications. Their lot is grievous, but what is its cause? Have they not been plunged into long-continuing misery by their doubts and their impatience? Thus doth our Supreme Governor justify his whole conduct towards his subjects, and in all things he acts consistently with wisdom and benignity; with truth and righteousness!

Lastly. May these reflections lead our thoughts to discern, in all occurrences, the wise and af-

fectionate Director by whom they are appointed ; — may they impress our hearts with a lively awe of the Sovereign Lord of the world and of the church, combined with the most ardent love and confidence ; — may they caution us against distrust and against disquietude, and encourage us to contentment ; — and may they teach us to be satisfied with the condition which has been appointed for us by God, without panting after a greater portion of felicity with restlessness and vehement desire ! Amen.

FOR THE FIRST

SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

JESUS CHRIST THE PECULIAR KING AND
LORD OF HIS REDEEMED.

THE PRAYER.

GRACIOUS Redeemer, exalted King and Lord! we prostrate ourselves before thy throne of grace with devotion and adoration, as thy most immediate subjects whom thou hast ransomed with thine own blood, to implore thee to vouchsafe thy continual defence of the kingdom which thou hast established amongst us. Sorrowfully must we confess, O dear Lord, and Deliverer! that we have not honoured thee as we ought to do, and have not obeyed thy holy commandments with becoming zeal, but have rendered ourselves unworthy of the glorious privilege of being subjects in thy kingdom of grace. Still thou art not a King that persecuteth or punisheth: for thy government is grace, mercy, and compassion. Thou rulest and governest only to effect our felicity. In this consolatory hope, grounded on thy

sufferings and death, we presume once again to supplicate thy relieving lenity and compassion, instead of the deserved punishment. Continue with us, Lord, with thy divine protection : preserve thy holy word and thy true doctrines unadulterated among us until the end of time. Give us a desire to hear, and strength to follow thine affectionate exhortations, until at last thou shalt remove us from this state of probation to thine eternal kingdom of glory, and there gladden us with all the saints in happiness incorruptible. In reliance on thy merits, we address these our prayers to Thee, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost. Hear us, Triune Deity ! Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

SERMON XII.

MATTHEW, xxi. 1—9.

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her : loose them, and bring them unto me, &c.

THE Gospel which has just been read, exhibits our blessed Saviour under a more glorious aspect than we are accustomed to see him present elsewhere. He is denominated a King, makes his entry into Jerusalem, and is honoured by the unanimous people with all the veneration which, according to the custom of the country, could be evinced for royal personages. They spread out their garments in the way, as a carpet for him to ride upon, as was done formerly for Jehu, when he

was chosen to be King over Israel.—2 Kings, ix. 13. They also strewed the way with palm and olive branches, or carried them in their hands, and escorted him with festive hymns of gratulation, as in former times the people with branches of the palm-tree in their hands, had sung the deliverance of Jerusalem from the pollutions of idolatry by Simon Maccabæus.—1 Maccab. xiii. 51. They chaunted in concert a song of joy taken from their great Hallelujahs.—Psalin cxviii. And a solemn confession was made that he is “the Son of David,” that “he cometh in the name of the Lord,” and is the true Messiah. But what vicissitudes ! Formerly despised, and wandering about from one place to another, amid various distresses ; but now extolled by common approbation, and overpowered with marks of reverence ;—formerly so indigent, and full of misery, as not to possess the little which could procure him shelter for his head ; but now to resemble a prince, by a retinue, which was the custom in the times of old ! After a few days, this glory is again exchanged for scorn ; and the same people who shouted “Hosanna, blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the Highest !” exclaimed a little after, with wild cries, “Crucify him, crucify him !” and this very Jesus, who is now ushered into their metropolis in a sort of triumph, after a lapse of a few days, is driven out to

Golgotha as a malefactor, and ends his days with thieves upon the cross. — Oh ! what vicissitudes !

Could Jesus then, by the assistance of the populace, have endeavoured to raise himself to the regal dignity in Jerusalem ? And could his intention have been counteracted by the craftiness of the Pharisees, and death have been his sentence as a punishment for his unlawful seizure of the power of the country's sovereign ? No ! this accusation is in no respect consistent with the conduct and disposition of our blessed Saviour. He had previously opposed the excited multitude that were set in motion by his miracles, in their design of making him a king. — John vi. 15 ; he had recently predicted his approaching sufferings and death ; — he had bewailed the impending desolation of the Jews, — and had threatened the city with the vengeance of the Lord. What hope then could he entertain of a kingdom there, where after a few days he justly expected the period of his life ; and where the arm of the Almighty was extended for vengeance, and direful punishment was on the point of being inflicted ? Of these unusual festivities, the Evangelist has interwoven the real cause in his narration : — “ All this was done,” says he, “ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, tell ye the Daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.” —

Zach. ix. 9. The approaching Messiah was to be distinguished, among many other characteristics, by an individual extraordinary pomp, which caught the eye, and made an impression, that the sensual multitude might be the more easily induced to allow him to be that which he was, and that he might exhibit all the marks which had been given to him by the prophets. In his person there had already been an exact fulfilment of the greater part; only this one remained prior to his sufferings, to make his entry into Jerusalem on a tame ass, with her colt by her side; and to this then Jesus must also adapt himself, that in all things he might accomplish all the requisites which had been prescribed to the true Messiah. Thus, on this day, he would not assume an external regal dignity and power over the Jewish nation: as he is a potentate of greater glory, and is the possessor of a superior realm which surpasses all that is terrestrial in mightiness and in authority, we are bound to honour him as our sovereign Ruler and most immediate Lord; and he is called our King, both by the prophets and apostles: but we ought not to vilify his dominion, by comparing it with one that is earthly. Both the importance of the thing, and the present suitable opportunity, oblige me to develope this subject in a short and connected discourse, as it involves a momentous truth in the religion of a Christian.

The chief point of doctrine which is to be propounded on the present occasion is therefore this :

JESUS CHRIST THE PECULIAR KING AND
LORD OF HIS REDEEMED.

We will direct our thoughts,

1st. To the kingdom itself, of which the Saviour is the Sovereign.

2dly. To the plan of administration, according to which he manages and exercises that royal power.

1st. Perspicuity and order command me to collect all the conceptions which pertain to the kingdom of the Messiah under these two considerations: 1st. That the realm which he governs by virtue of his redemption, is not earthly ; it flourishes on earth, but yet without all terrestrial and evanescent greatness : 2dly. That the realm in which he reigns as Redeemer is spiritual ; it diffuses itself over the souls of men, and furthers their eternal happiness. Both these divisions will lead us to a pure, scriptural idea of the kingdom, or the generally-called regal office, of Christ. Under this name we are accustomed to represent to ourselves the different transactions and ordinances by which he purchased for the fallen human species that

blessedness which they had forfeited. According to his voluntary counsel, he was appointed to be a Mediator for sinners between the Deity and them. It was his peculiar, his chief province, to reconcile the incensed Creator to his rebellious creatures, and to remove all the obstructions by which their intimate union had been interrupted: in consequence of which, he must procure for transgressors freedom from punishment, and access to the divine mercy;—he must inform them of the salvation which he had obtained, and be their Instructor in the means by which it could be acquired,—and he must participate in the labour, and arrange that which is necessary for the effectual beatification of his redeemed. To each of these departments, certain especial and honourable titles have been given by the Scriptures; and they describe him as a High Priest, when he comes forward as an atoning sacrifice, to obtain salvation for us;—as a Prophet, when he informs us of it by his doctrines,—and as a King, when he avails himself of his supreme mightiness to make freely purchased transgressors the partakers of the real benefits and fruits of his redemption. The vocations of High Priest, Prophet, and King, are then the separate parts of the one grand dominion which he will exercise in the world: that is, in all of them he is a Mediator and a Peace-maker, and this momentous object is common to all of them, in order to execute

and complete the everlasting deliverance of ruined man. For the same reason, in various passages, St. Paul comprises all the benefits of our blessed Lord towards the human race under the simple name of Mediator. He calls him “a Mediator between God and man,”—“the Mediator of a better Covenant,” and of the New Testament. Now this hint may serve to explain the constitution of the Saviour’s kingdom. He is not then our Sovereign in the most proper acceptation of the word, because, in conjunction with the Father and the Spirit, he governs the dominions of the Almighty, which extend over all nature, and which authority is founded on creation; for by creating, preserving, and sustaining both angels and men, and both animate and inanimate things, God hath established for himself a boundless sovereignty over the whole world. This also belongs unto the Son, as he is God, and of the same nature and properties as the Father; and it is his as Man, by virtue of the incomprehensible union by which his human nature was conjoined with the divine, in one person, and made partaker of all the glory that is possessed by the Deity; for “He hath put all things in subjection under his feet: for in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.”—Heb. xi. 8. But Christ ruleth over this kingdom as God and Man, and not as Redeemer: and it belongs to his common providence

over the universe ; but not to his atonement for men in particular : and then only has this his supreme empire any influence on the work of redemption, when he avails himself of it to promote either the one or the other in the especial system which is arranged for the salvation of a ruined race. Over these he hath his own especial sovereignty, and a dominion over the property which had been delivered up to him by the Father, when he bound himself by an everlasting covenant to become their Saviour. They are his peculiar subjects, and He is their proper and most immediate Lord. It is a kingdom of grace, in which by the assistance of certain means which are intended for that purpose, he governs, and disposes his gratuitously purchased people for the blessedness, for the sake of which he tasted death for them, and for an actual participation of all the spiritual and endless glory, in which we have a portion and inheritance, in consequence of his spontaneous sufferings. Jesus Christ is then our King and Lord, because he is a Mediator and Peace-maker between the Deity and us ; and we are his subjects, not merely as the creatures of his hands, but as those who were once forlorn, but are now redeemed by him unto a life which never will be ended. Hear him testify this himself in his solemn address to the Father, when on the eve of his concluding sufferings : “ Thou hast given him,” that is, thy Son, “ power over all flesh,

that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."—John xvii. 2. Of the constitution of this kingdom of Jesus, it cannot then be difficult for us now to form an opinion.

The former of the two premised considerations is already partly demonstrated. The kingdom is not earthly; it flourishes on earth, but is devoid of all terrestrial grandeur. We are not redeemed to be promoted unto worldly honour, to revel in sensuality, or to sparkle with the deceitful ornaments of riches. A petty happiness! which malice can destroy and craft corrupt; which violence can hurry to destruction, which worms can devour, and which the sepulchre can swallow up. The Saviour sacrificed his precious life, to convey to us a more durable and more noble felicity. We were to be prepared for a worthy communion with the supreme Governor of heaven and earth. But how little adapted to so exalted a destination is terrestrial magnificence! For this only draws away the mind from that which is invisible, and presses it down under sensual desires; this induces us to forget God, instead of rendering him honour and thanksgivings. Christ had been an unwise King, the ruin and the real desolation of his subjects, if, through outward pomp and worldly decorations, he had taught them to be vain: and little did the Jews know how to judge respecting their own advantage when they looked for a Messiah,

who would erect triumphal columns over innumerable heaps of slaughtered enemies, and satiate their licentious appetites with the fruitfulness of the earth. Their carnal disposition gained a victory over reason, and concealed from their fascinated eyes the true design of the promises of the Deity; so that they neither saw nor inquired after any thing but blessings which were corporeal. When the Lord attested occasionally by the Psalmist, that "the promised Saviour should rule from one sea to the other, should tread kings under foot in the day of his wrath, and judge among the heathen," their concupiscence was ready immediately to convert these expressions into sensual descriptions. The prophets selected such emblems of the Messiah's kingdom, in order to impress the people with the most lofty notions of his infinite power and dignity. The name of King was the highest honour, and the mightiness of a conqueror the greatest glory; for men knew nothing more exalted: and he was sometimes portrayed under these forms, that anxiously desiring Israel might meditate on him, in the expectation of a most excellent and elevated personage, and that a long series of years might not cause a diminution of their wish for him, and chill their hearts against his advent. God, however, would not confine the hope of the people concerning the arrival of "the Prince of Peace" to earthly

views; and with sufficient perspicuity he had characterized him, in other prophecies, as the Deliverer of the Soul, the Protector of Virtue, the Consolation of the miserable, the Relief of the afflicted, the Propitiator of sins, and the Author of an everlasting felicity for all men. His kingdom is not described as a tyranny, but as a “ blessing over all people.”—Gen. xii. and xxii: as a conversion, enlightening, and an advancement of salvation, not only of the Jews, but of all the Gentiles.—Isaiah, ix. and xlix: as a diffusion of righteousness, virtue, piety, and an eternal deliverance.—Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. As the mercy of God upon a sinful nation.—Hosea, ii. 23. Further, this same King, whose dominions were to extend to the uttermost parts of the earth, is described by Moses as a Prophet and an Instructor.—Deut. xviii. 15: by David, as a Priest for ever.—Psalm cx. 4: and by the Prophet Isaiah, as despised and rejected of men, as one who was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, who took upon himself the chastisement of our peace, and with whose stripes we are healed.—liii. According to the prophecies then, the Messiah could not glitter as a terrestrial potentate, environed with external state and splendour: and his government was not to be distinguished by long extended ranks of valiant or of gorgeous attendants, or by immense treasures, by rich possessions, or by bloody

victories. The elder, but more judicious Israel expected him under a more glorious appearance, and considered him “as the Lord, their Righteousness.”—Jeremiah, xxiii. 6. Only the posterior, corrupt generation that were inflamed with a foolish jealousy against the Romans, forgot the purpose of the Saviour’s mission, and fancied a Protector unlike the one the Deity had promised. It is melancholy, indeed, that a great number of the more modern acknowledgers of Christianity are fallen into the same prejudices! On this ground the pretended vicegerent of Jesus has established his unjust monarchy; and from this idea is derived the flattering hope in some simple ones, relative to the future visible kingdom of the Messiah. The sad effect of the propensity of the human heart that inclines it to what is sensual! And being abandoned to its own desires, it presumes ultimately to resist and pervert the clearest truths. What is plainer than this express assurance of our blessed Lord? “My kingdom is not of this world.”—John, xviii. 36. And as his whole life was an unbroken chain of the most grievous hardships, being overpowered with ignominy and sought after by ferocious persecutors; can there be a clearer evidence that nothing which is earthly has a place in the dominions of the promised Christ? It was to flourish upon earth, and to be established among men without any exception of country or of

people; and from all nations the Messiah will collect inhabitants for the heavenly Jerusalem, and exercise his regal authority over the dwellers in every part of the world: it was this that the prophets had in view, when they declared that the Gentiles should be his inheritance, and the ends of the earth for his possession; and David himself has interpreted their predictions in that sense, “All the ends of the world shall remember themselves, and be turned unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him.”—Psalm xxii. 27. But in this kingdom, which is so extensive, no part will be adorned with empty grandeur; and his subjects must not evince their respect for him by external pompous ceremonies, and expensive rites and ordinances to his honour, and much less must they arrogate to themselves a greater power, in his name, and as for his glory. The realm in which he ruleth as Redeemer, is spiritual; it diffuses itself over the souls of men, and forwards their eternal happiness. The proofs of this, our second proposition, are chiefly comprehended in the former; for what except the soul can belong to that state which, according to the adduced evidence, is to cause conversion and instruction; to exercise itself in righteousness, in virtue, and in piety; to effectuate a deliverance from the merited chastisement of sin, and to open the road to an everlasting state

of felicity?—glories of which an intelligent and thinking spirit is either solely or chiefly susceptible. But neither hath the Saviour neglected here also to lead us to correct conceptions, by his instructive lessons. He testifies openly, “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall men say, lo here! or lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you.”—Luke, xvii. 20, 21. And he confesses before Pilate, “thou sayest that I am a king;” but he also describes the constitution of his government in these words: “to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth;” therefore, then, as a king he ought to inculcate, plant and defend the truth, and, according to his regal dignity, he ought to produce and maintain in the heart, the diffusion and the progress of the true divine word, the precious Gospel. He discriminates his domination from an earthly power, and then calls it, “a heavenly kingdom, or that of God;” he requires repentance and faith as a condition in those who wish to become his subjects: “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent ye and believe the Gospel.” Lastly, St. Paul has developed and defined the Messiah’s government in this concise but forcible description: “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”—Rom. xiv. 17. And again,

at another place, where mention is made of the covenant into which the Redeemer hath entered with the members of his kingdom, he is introduced as saying, “I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people.” — Hebrews, viii. 10. With the assistance of these divine assurances let us come to right conclusions concerning the kingly administration of the Redeemer; that it is established in the soul and relates to the eternal bliss of mankind, by a confession of the truth, and that it comprehends the knowledge and understanding of the ways of life; faith and confidence in the means of redemption which God appointed; aversion from evil, love of that which is good, and an unfeigned religious veneration. Our blessed Saviour rules as king, in that he disseminates and establishes this knowledge, and supports, promotes and maintains an effective love of holiness and virtue in the amended heart; and he exercises his regal authority, when, by useful arrangements, he assists the advancement of the Gospel, — prepares what is requisite for the powerful operation of truth upon the mind, — defends his church against the violence of persecutors, — secures his doctrines from the subtlety of deceivers, — wards off the formidable attack which the Spirit of lies, associated with scoffers, presumes to make occasionally; and when he hurls the bold sinner,

who had long defied his mercy, into his deserved perdition, but brings out the good man from all his troubles with conquering power until at last he is crowned with honour and with glory in eternity. The members of his realm, over whom this perfect form of government can be exercised for their own advantage, are the converted and the faithful; but he that continues in impenitence is still a subject, although he denies his dutiful allegiance to his lawful Sovereign; for Jesus doth not lose his title as proprietor, or his regal power, although the ungodly dare to rise against him. Even for those who dishonour him by their words or conduct, he shed his blood; and on those who indurate their hearts for a determinate resistance, he avails himself of the most serviceable means of improvement. Does not this benefit deserve to be denominated kindness; and are not they, who are thus disobedient, made subject unto his authority? To speak definitely, the subjects of his kingdom are all mankind, for all participate in his redemption; but only those who are his faithful servants, as being obedient, rightly disposed and sincere, are deserving of the appellation of true subjects of the kingdom of grace. The remnant are seditious, evil-minded and worthless ones, who are only tolerated for a time, as long as mercy combined with wisdom can permit it. By

pure doctrine, and seduce the inconsiderate multitude: an unanticipated occurrence arrests wickedness in the midst of its career, and leads back the deluded to reflection. This was certainly the Lord of the Church, who would keep them from perdition. A trading people discovers an unknown region, where bigotry and ignorance prevail: this is the means of producing a knowledge of the Gospel, which takes root and grows up to the consolation of innumerable souls. Who ought to defraud the Saviour of the honour of having led the travelling Christians to those ignorant beings for the purpose of extending his kingdom to the most remote parts of the earth, according to the prophecy? Here simple conjecture shall not serve for an evidence. We have his own testimony to allege—"All power is given unto me in heaven and earth," saith he; and this assures us, that the whole creation, both immaterial and material beings; and both the living and the void of life, are ready for his service when he orders; but that they minister to him in action for the advancement of truth and piety, he proves himself in the following additional clause: by virtue of this power in heaven and earth, he inspires his apostles for the promulgation of the Gospel: "Go," saith he, "and teach all nations."—Matthew, xxviii. 18, 19. Thus, then, his ambassadors might prepare themselves with confidence for the most

toilsome journies and the greatest hardships; for whatsoever befell them, he could turn to their advantage, and would promote their errand by a powerful support of every thing in nature, which has been put in subjection under him.

Still such means are less effective and less frequently adopted than those which are spiritual. As Redeemer, he hath appointed the word and sacraments, these ordinary instruments of grace, for the proper governance of his kingdom. With these he will penetrate the heart and purify the soul, and through them his saving power will be operative on the mind. He works with the word of the law upon the secure and refractory, to infuse into them acerbity and sorrow, and he avails himself of the benign promises of the Gospel, when addressing himself to the heart-broken and the contrite, to fill them with consolation. The former are to be persuaded to amend their lives, and the latter are to be advanced to courage in the faith; the former are to be brought to a repentance of their sins, and the latter strengthened in the love of virtue; and the former are to be introduced into the kingdom of grace, whilst the latter are to be protected as its legitimate subjects. Thus he describes the use of the Scriptures in the glorious address to his Father. as St. John relates it: "I have given unto them," that is, the

apostles, "the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have surely known that I came out from God, and they have believed that thou didst send me."—John, xvii. 8. An enlightening and faith are then the effects of the word; but these are produced by the mighty influence of our Lord himself; and on this account the apostles ascribe to him both their vocation to the ministry and their success in the diffusion of his dogmas. They portray him as a chief Shepherd, who not only appoints his servants, but also endues them with suitable strength, and blesses their preaching by a divine co-operation.

With the means which Christ employs in the administration of his kingdom we are now acquainted: but that we may have a most accurate conception of his whole plan of government, we must briefly inquire, by what method he makes use of them, that by their means he may effect his important purpose? This is correspondent with his sublime perfections: he rules with an all-seeing wisdom and an irresistible power; with clemency and with relieving mercy. From this point of view in particular, his regal office in the Gospel for the day is chiefly derived. It exhibits a remarkable instance of his wisdom and omniscience. He had a fore-knowledge of the most fortuitous occurrence, that in a village where he

had not been, an ass stood tied with her foal, at the very instant that he drew nigh to the Mount of Olives ; but this circumstance, which was apparently unimportant, was wisely adopted for a most momentous transaction, for it supplied him with an opportunity to accomplish a sublime prophecy relative to the expected Messiah. Just before he had evinced his Omnipotence, by healing two blind men who cried after him ; the extraordinary veneration which was demonstrated for his person by the populace, and their unanticipated conviction of his divine dignity, are also peculiarly declaratory of his mightiness and power to bend men's hearts according to his pleasure. Lastly, meekness is also ascribed to him as a distinguishing feature, for which his regal government should be peculiarly remarkable. What an unspeakable consolation for the blessed subjects who are obedient, is to be derived from all these attributes ! With a glance he surveys all the possible events which can either cause the increase or diminution of their welfare. The necessities of his kingdom are not unknown to him ; neither is he destitute of the best counsel to remove them ; for prudence and foresight conduct all his decrees ; in indigence he knows how to procure seasonable succour, and in prosperity he forgets not to prevent the injurious consequences which would

ensue from the assault of adversity. His mighty weaponed arm lays low the most violent enemies, and repels the fiercest encounters. He is always invincible, always victorious, constantly ready to be the defender of his faithful, and their surest refuge when deserted by the world. He decrees and he executes, without being impeded by occurring difficulties: he commands, and all nature must obey his first signal. Yes, what can press down him whom he will make mighty? "I can do all things, through Christ, which strengtheneth me," says St. Paul. — Phil. iv. 13. Notwithstanding this, our blessed Lord does not govern with inflexible severity. He thunders out no sentence of death on the first offence, and pours forth no bitter reproaches against those by whom he is forsaken: through love he suffered death for us: in love he invited us to his kingdom, and with love he rules us. Instead of commanding, he makes use of persuasions and allurements; and we are not regarded as his slaves, but as his children and beloved friends. He forgives trespasses without avenging them, provided they be discontinued: from time to time he spares obdurate sinners, and repeats his offers with equal sincerity and willingness, as long as the general welfare of the state does not compel him to resort to vengeance.

I need scarcely ask if this plan of government

